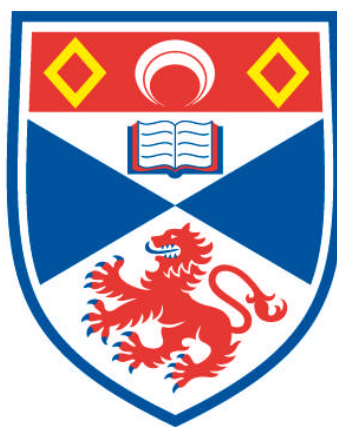


**DIVINE ACTION, CHRIST AND THE DOCTRINE OF GOD :  
THE TRINITARIAN GRAMMAR OF ADOLF SCHLATTER'S  
THEOLOGY**

**Andreas Loos**

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD  
at the  
University of St Andrews**



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# **DIVINE ACTION, CHRIST AND THE DOCTRINE OF GOD**

The Trinitarian Grammar of Adolf Schlatter's Theology

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

Andreas Loos

University of St. Andrews

29 March 2005



## ABSTRACT

This dissertation constitutes an examination of the inner-theological basis of Adolf Schlatter's theology which, as recent research has established, needs to be understood in terms of a theology of God's works. The foundation of Schlatter's theology is reconstructed by means of a critical outline and assessment of three dogmatic concepts, namely: a) the relation between God and the world; b) the ground and mode of God's agency in, and towards, the world; c) the structure of God's agency and works.

I argue that the doctrine of the Trinity constitutes the ontological basis for Schlatter's concept of divine action. It is seen that Schlatter relates God's triune being *ad intra* and God's triune economy *ad extra*, through the notion of love. This *analogia caritatis* assumes the form of an *analogia operationis* which gives rise to an *analogia relationis*. Special attention is devoted in this context, first, to the role which Schlatter ascribes to the Holy Spirit and, second, to the Christocentricity of Schlatter's approach. At decisive points in this study, attention is drawn to parallels between Schlatter's thought and the contemporary trinitarian theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg, Colin Gunton, Christoph Schwöbel and others.

In the light of the trinitarian depth-structures of Schlatter's theology of divine action, an effort is made to explicate his theology of God's works as an attempt to model a theology in methodological obedience to God's triune economy. Fundamental aspects of Schlatter's approach are briefly reconsidered from a trinitarian perspective. What the present study has found itself obliged to offer constitutes, in essence, a new reading of Schlatter's dogmatics, conceived, in effect, as an *applied trinitarian theology*.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The conclusion of this thesis is due to the help and influence of a number of people to whom I owe a debt of gratitude. Professor Alan Torrance has accompanied my academic work and the becoming of this thesis with great encouragement and support. As my *Doktorvater* in the full sense of the word, he consistently offered helpful advice – not only with respect to my research but also concerning my personal life and that of my family. Dr. Werner Neuer greatly inspired this thesis during its initial stages and – through his comprehensive knowledge of Schlatter's life and work – enabled me to complete my research after it had been interrupted by my move to a teaching position at St. Chrischona Theological Seminary in Switzerland. The personal and theological debt I owe these two persons can only be adumbrated here by affirming that without them there would be no thesis at all.

The proof-reading of this study by Elizabeth Wenzel requires special mention. I found the challenge to write a dissertation in English as my second language aggravated by the fact that Schlatter, whose style of writing causes frequent lamentation even among German-speaking theologians, is difficult to translate. Elizabeth Wenzel has improved the language of this study enormously, and this in such a way that she did not simply replace my English but made it more readable and lucid.

Finally, my deepest gratitude is to my dear wife, Simone. Her strength gave me the freedom to do my research. In her curiosity she became a constant dialogue-partner with whom I had to discuss the latest theological insights from my work. By her knowledge of my self she enabled me to keep focused and to relax at the appropriate time. It is her love which continues to open my eyes to the relational, indeed, "trinitarian depth structures" of our life.



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## CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

### 1. The State of Research: Schlatter's Theology as a Theology of God's Works

Although the 150th birthday of the Swiss-born theologian Adolf Schlatter (16 August 2002) triggered a rather contained academic discussion of his theology, there is no doubt that the last thirty years have brought with them a renewed interest in his theological work. This interest is no longer limited to Schlatter's exegetical work nor to German theology in general. Rather, his systematic and philosophical theology has increasingly come into focus and some of his major works have been translated into English alongside the establishment of what could be called an American scholarship on Schlatter.<sup>1</sup>

This dissertation is an attempt, consequently, to continue these lines of research, not only with respect to scholarly timeliness and international academic exchange but also, and primarily, with regard to the material state of research. The two most recently published monographs by Walldorf and Rieger affirm and follow Neuer's interpretation of Schlatter's theology as a "theology of facts" or, to use Schlatter's own phrase, "observational theology."<sup>2</sup> We must not reproduce here what others have exhaustively outlined and discussed,

---

<sup>1</sup> For an overview of the respective literature see Neuer, "Introduction *Die Bibel verstehen*," 9-10. It seems worth mentioning in passing that Yarbrough's dissertation, *The heilsgeschichtliche Perspective* has recently been published (*The Salvation Historical Fallacy? Reassessing the History of New Testament Theology*. Leiderdorp: Deo Publishing, 2004), that a translation of Schlatter's *Kennen wir Jesus?* will be published in 2005 and that two dissertations have been submitted recently: one by Clemens Hägele on Schlatter's scrip-tology (University of Dortmund) and the other by Daniel Rüegg on Schlatter's doctrine of the sacraments (London School of Theology).

<sup>2</sup> *Briefe*, 76-77. A coherent and systematic outline of Schlatter's conception can be found in Neuer, *Zusammenhang*, 43-49, 245-52; idem, *Adolf Schlatter: ein Leben*, 167, 488-98. See further Walldorf, *Realistische Philosophie*, 251-72; Rieger, *Rechtfertigungslehre*, 241-49; von Lüpke, "Gottes Gaben wahrnehmen," 283-90.

however, a pithy sketch of Schlatter's theological conception is required in order to clear the ground for understanding the task and the promise of this study.

An "observational theology" is, according to Schlatter, a theology grounded in the perception of God's revelatory actions and works within the created reality of this world.<sup>3</sup>

The primary and most important function of the dogmatician is that one thing which in every scientific work occupies first place, namely observation. Observation shows him in reality those events that bring us into relationship with God and mediate the divine acting to us by which God unveils himself to us. . . . [I]n this way the dogmatician does not, of course, establish the existence of God, but rather our certainty of God by outlining how God, through his own work, establishes this certainty in us.<sup>4</sup>

These words indicate that the indissoluble connection between knowledge of God's being and of God's agency is a fundamental characteristic of Schlatter's dogmatics.

Only then can we speak of knowledge of God *when he makes himself knowable to us through his work which happens to us*. If we were looking for a knowledge of God that came about without him and was not his gift, we would tear apart our idea of God through a contradiction, since we make ourselves independent of the one whom we call our God and creator, and make him dependent on us if we try to establish our relationship to him on our own. *We know God exclusively through God himself, only because he grants us his knowledge and only in so far as he does this. When we ask for God we ask for his revelation* (emphasis A. L.).<sup>5</sup>

Schlatter's theological conception is directly connected with his awareness that the disregard of God's actions and works gives rise to two self-contradictions in theology. The first one is a *methodological* self-contradiction. As soon as the divine economy is negated as constituent of knowledge of God, the latter must necessarily come about without God. Thus, theology stands in contradiction to its own object.

Since the senses do not provide us with a picture of God, the idea of God seemed to be the property of reason which the latter gained somehow by its own means and at which it is called to try its skill of thinking. However, every rationalistic theology dies. This happens not only because it fails to recognise the always valid conditions of our thinking but also because it gets entangled in an especially harsh contradiction in its evaluation of the concept of God. *A knowledge of God, which were to come about without God, would carry in itself the denial of God. One only becomes aware of God through him. Every so-called knowing of God which claims to have come about without God, collapses because of this antithesis* (emphasis A. L.).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Schlatter has a holistic understanding of the terms "empirical" and "observational." They refer to sensory as well as spiritual perception (*Wahrnehmung*) and thus enclose the whole of man's experience of reality. See Walldorf, *Realistische Philosophie*, 60-65; Neuer, *Zusammenhang*, 45-46.

<sup>4</sup> *Dogma*, 12.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.



In his unpublished inaugural lecture the young Schlatter already states in plain terms:

"Even our theological work of thinking does not issue creative commands: 'Let there be!'"<sup>7</sup>

The second self-contradiction concerns the *material level* of dogmatics. Without reference to God's actions and works, theological knowledge and speech disintegrate into

a description of God which lists his attributes and thus consists in general ideas through which the richness of the divine acting is to be grasped and ordered. Such descriptions of God, however, provide us merely with abstractions without the perceptions out of which they grow, disconnected from the actualities in which they have their ground. Yet, our ideas are knowledge only when the facts out of which they emerged stand before our perception. Therefore, the propositions used for the description of God easily gave the impression that they were ungrounded because it was no longer visible from whence they stemmed. Out of this emerged the peculiar undertaking to supplementarily prove the idea of God although the theologian allegedly possessed it already. Because only the syllogistic combination of abstractions should serve this purpose, these proofs did not establish knowledge and did not overcome doubt but rather awakened it.<sup>8</sup>

This means that the doctrine of God stands unmediated and disconnected from the rest of the dogmatic loci. The irrelevance of the perception of God's works and actions for knowledge of God's being turns into the theological irrelevance of God's being. The latter loses its constitutive function for the theological understanding of the divine actions and works. Theology suffers, so to speak, a twofold loss of reality.

The scholarly consensus established during the last twenty years can be summarised as follows: At the heart of Schlatter's "theology of facts" lies the indissoluble connection between knowledge of God's actions and works and knowledge of, and speech about, God. On account of this, Schlatter's theology can also be called a theology of God's works.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> \**Dogma und Geschichte*," 8.

<sup>8</sup> *Dogma*, 12.

<sup>9</sup> A closer look at the material just outlined would reveal what Neuer outlines as the three reasons for Schlatter's conception: his epistemology, his concept of revelation and the missionary dimension of his theology. See Neuer, *Zusammenhang*, 45-46; idem, *Adolf Schlatter: ein Leben*, 489-90.

## 2. The Task and the Promise of the Present Study

The principal aim of this dissertation is to examine the inner-theological foundation of Schlatter's theology of God's works. The significance of this lies in the fact that the conceptual possibility and the nature of a theology such as propounded by Schlatter rest upon its capacity to answer the following questions: How does theology conceive of

- a) the relation between God and the world as his creation?
- b) the ground and mode of God's agency in and towards creation?
- c) the structure of God's agency and works?

A systematic and coherent discussion of these fundamental issues would amount to something like a theology of divine action. The fact that Schlatter does not provide such a theology does not mean, however, that he leaves the above questions aside. Rather, the concept of divine agency is integral to – and underlies – Schlatter's exposition of the different works of God – that is, the products of God's actions – as they constitute God's *Heilsgeschichte*.

Subject to the aforementioned conditions, the prime objective of this study is to reconstruct Schlatter's theory of divine action in a systematic manner. In this we seek, first of all, to fill a surprising gap in the research carried out on Schlatter thus far and, second, to substantiate, deepen and – whenever necessary – critically assess the results of past research within this field. Indeed, the perspective which we adopt requires what may be described as a “new reading” of Schlatter in that our primary thesis is, quite simply, that Schlatter's concept of divine agency not only gives rise to, but is also grounded upon, a doctrine of the ontological Trinity. Appreciating this will be argued to be absolutely essential to understanding Schlatter's approach aright. To this end, we shall seek to show that this is crucial to appreciating how Schlatter – on the basis of God's self-revelation in the person and work

of Christ – both interrelates and integrates statements about God's triune being; about God's interrelation and interaction with the world; about the relational structure of God's actions and works; and, finally, about the relational and dynamic character of creaturely being. Central to this conception is a pneumatologically-reflected notion of God's triune love, according to which Schlatter relates the respective analogues at the material as well as at the noetic level of dogmatics.

Our use of phrases such as "trinitarian grammar" or "trinitarian depth structures" is intended to indicate from the very beginning a) that Schlatter's trinitarian conception of divine action cannot be found as a single and coherent locus of his dogmatics and b) that explicit references to the Trinity occur rather occasionally in his writings. On these grounds it would be a hopeless over-interpretation of Schlatter to argue for the Trinity as some kind of *a priori* principle from which he deduces his theology. On the other hand, the argumentation of this study seeks at every point to avoid projecting into Schlatter concepts which are not demonstrably grounded in his writings. Our argument will be that the trinitarian "depth structures" of his theology arise – so to speak organically – from his attempt to model a theocentric dogmatics which does not treat God's being as a separate doctrinal piece.<sup>10</sup> It is imperative, therefore, that theologians are not misled into downplaying the trinitarian character of Schlatter's theology due to his not having developed its trinitarian structure more explicitly. An interesting witness to the discovery of such dogmatic "depth structures" appears in Peter Brunner's foreword to Michael Seemann's book on Brunner's *Gottesdienstlehre*:

*Bei dieser Gelegenheit möchte ich Ihnen doch noch sagen, daß Ihre Darstellung mir sogar gewisse Züge meiner Gottesdienstlehre deutlich gemacht hat, die ich so vorher nicht gesehen habe. Dabei war mir besonders aufschlußreich, wie der katholische Theologe die Zentrierung meiner Gottesdienstlehre um die Rechtfertigung hervorhebt. Ich darf Ihnen versichern, daß dieses Merkmal nicht einem vorge-*

---

<sup>10</sup> This is the reason we do not find a separate and coherent outline of God's being – that is, a theology in the narrow sense of the word – in Schlatter's dogmatics. See also Neuer, *Zusammenhang*, 56-57.

*faßten Plan zu verdanken ist, als ob ich mir gesagt hätte: 'Du bist evangelischer Theologe, also mußt du von der Rechtfertigungslehre aus die Gottesdienstlehre entwickeln.' Ein solcher Gedanke ist mir weder vor noch während meiner Arbeit gekommen. Es vollzog sich jene Zentrierung, die Sie beobachtet haben, sozusagen ganz von selbst. 'Rechtfertigung' ist eben kein isolierter Glaubensartikel (wenn sie auch an ihrem dogmatischen Ort gesondert zur Sprache kommen muß), sondern prägt – recht verstanden – als tragende Mitte das Ganze der christlichen Lehre.<sup>11</sup>*

This thesis, then, constitutes a creative reconstruction of Schlatter's thought by way of a synopsis of essential aspects of his theology under a frame of reference which is not explicitly given and which, therefore, cannot simply be reproduced.

The material constellation just indicated requires that primacy be given to the reconstructive aspect of the task before us. Clearly, the scholarly legitimacy of this thesis – and, consequently, its contribution to the field of research – stands or falls with our capacity to ground our argumentation incontestably in Schlatter's writings and thought. Two formal measures have been taken in order to support this effort.

First, we intend to substantiate our interpretation with recourse to extensive references – not only to published sources but to a great deal of unpublished work to which we have been privileged to have access.

Second, we have sought to design the architectonics of this thesis in such a way that it reflects Schlatter's *Denkweg*, namely the direction of his theological thinking. Consequently, we shall begin with an examination of his understanding of God's action in creation, preservation and salvation before progressing to a systematic outline of his theory of divine action. In chapters IV and V we show how Schlatter's christology and – in the wake of that – his doctrine of the Trinity, govern his interpretation of divine agency. We seek to establish, by way of a summary, that an awareness of the trinitarian "depth structures" of Schlatter's theology is necessary to understand fully the thrust and logic of his dogmatics as a whole – a feature that Schlatter-scholarship thus far has appreciated all too little.

---

<sup>11</sup> P. Brunner, "Geleitwort zu P. Dr. Michael Seemanns Buch," 335-36.

It is obvious from what has just been said that this dissertation seeks to point beyond itself to future scholarly work by establishing the basis for a conversation between Schlatter's unique theological contribution and contemporary trinitarian theology. This is not something which we attempt in this thesis since to do so properly would constitute a thesis in itself.

## CHAPTER II. PROBES INTO SCHLATTER'S CONCEPT OF DIVINE AGENCY

We have chosen Schlatter's teaching on creation, preservation and salvation as the basis for our investigation of his understanding of divine economy. Our primary concern in this chapter is not to explore Schlatter's ontological understanding of these three dogmatic loci as established products of God's agency. Rather, our objective is to unearth his conception of the ways which God himself has chosen for his action toward and within creation.<sup>1</sup> We shall approach these topics mainly from an anthropological perspective whereby frequent reference will be given to Schlatter's understanding of God's action toward, and in, the impersonal sphere of creation.

### 1. God – the Creator of Humanity

#### A. Introductory remarks

##### i. The ontological dependence of creation upon the Creator

At the outset of this section it seems necessary to bring some basic aspects of Schlatter's understanding of God as Creator to our attention. In Schlatter, God is the "originator and worker [*Wirker*]," the "Creator and Perfecter. The one, 'who causes everything,' is God – the one, 'from whom and through whom and to whom everything is.'"<sup>2</sup> Through his crea-

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<sup>1</sup> The close connection between an act and its product comes to the fore when we use the same word for an action and its result (e.g. creation or salvation). Since we are primarily concerned with Schlatter's notion of divine action, our presentation of his doctrines of creation, man, sin, providence, salvation, redemption, etc. as God's works will be of merely fragmentary character. Many questions arising from the presented material must remain unanswered. References to helpful primary and secondary sources will be given.

<sup>2</sup> *Gründe*, 29; similarly in *Metaphysik*, 59; *Opfer*, 3. Schlatter goes as far as to say that "[b]eing God means being Creator" (*Theology of the Apostles*, 28; cf. *Paulus der Bote*, 255). See also Neuer, *Zusammenhang*, 64-66.

tive action upon the creature, God constitutes the ontological basis of all creation. Schlatter argues "that we must conceive of everything as being conditioned by God."<sup>3</sup> This means that every creature is contingent upon God for its existence and being. "All are creatures and stand in an unalterable dependence on God."<sup>4</sup> This dependence is, as Schlatter elaborates, expressed through the concept of God's Fatherhood. By calling God our Father

we . . . name the one to whom we owe *that* we are and *what* we are . . . . This powerful connection embraces everything in us. As mysterious and inexplicable as it may be, it is a brightly shining reality, incontestable, and fundamental to our whole consciousness, so that a community emerges here which is incomparable and unbreakable (emphasis A. L.).<sup>5</sup>

Schlatter articulates the ontological relatedness of the creature to God as "the dependence, in which everything created stands in relation to him [God]," as "the untearable bond through which everything created clings to the Creator," or as "our communion [*Verbundenheit*] with God . . . [which] gives us existence and essence."<sup>6</sup>

## ii. The analogy of all creaturely being and the notion of the *imago Dei*

The thoughts just sketched out result in a rather broad and general concept of the *imago Dei*. In antithesis to a naturalistic concept of divine causality Schlatter expounds: "We are receptive to the Christian idea of God only when we understand causation in such a way as to bring forth community and make the recipient of the effect the image and wit-

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<sup>3</sup> \**Wesen und Quellen*, 15.

<sup>4</sup> *Theology of the Apostles*, 31; similarly in *Erläuterungen III*, 436.

<sup>5</sup> *Ruf Jesu*, 313. See also *Dogma* 87-89; *Kennen wir Jesus?*, 28-29; \**Genesis*, 40-41.

<sup>6</sup> *Metaphysik*, 87; *Dogma*, 38; "Theology of the New Testament and Dogmatics," 182 (in above order). We will examine Schlatter's concept of the relation between God and man more closely in due course. However, it is already necessary to introduce here the distinction between creaturely God-relatedness (*Gottesbezogenheit*) and soteriological God-relationship (*Gottesbeziehung*). Schlatter himself does not explicitly use these terms, but the differentiation is inherent in his concept. "God-relatedness" denotes "the general relation of all to God which is instituted through creation" (*Johannes*, 28). "God-relationship" refers to the personal communion of God and believer instituted through the saving work of Jesus Christ and mediated by the Holy Spirit. See also Walldorf's exposition of Schlatter's notion of God-relatedness in *Realistische Philosophie*, 236-37 and Neuer, *Zusammenhang*, 148-50.

ness of the one who causes him [the recipient]."<sup>7</sup> Schlatter conceives "the divine causing [*Wirken*] as the divine forming [*Bilden*] which generates his image [*Bild*] in us."<sup>8</sup> Thus every creature is generally a witness of its maker and called to be God's image.<sup>9</sup> "Intrinsic to the idea of God is the notion that all being is related to God and somehow makes his power and will visible."<sup>10</sup>

Through the ontological relatedness of every creature to God there emerges an analogy of all creaturely being. "Our connectedness with God connects us with everything because everything is connected with God."<sup>11</sup> In other words: "Our relatedness with everything rests upon the fact that we, and with us everything that exists, have come about through God."<sup>12</sup> In this way, God as Creator establishes a homogeneity and unity which enables interrelation and interaction between the different spheres of created reality.<sup>13</sup> Yet, as Schlatter underlines, the analogy of creaturely being means also true otherness and distinctness. "However, because it is not our image but God's image (which is indissolubly different from our image) that is in everything, we stop any attempt to arbitrarily remove the differences that distinguish us."<sup>14</sup> In our context here this means that the *imago Dei* of man is distinct from the *imago Dei* of the rest of creation.

It is interesting to observe that Schlatter's anthropology does not entail an explicit exposition of the notion of man being created in the image of God. This does not mean, how-

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<sup>7</sup> *Metaphysik*, 59.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>9</sup> See *ibid.*, 46-47.

<sup>10</sup> *Dogma*, 13.

<sup>11</sup> *Metaphysik*, 46.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>13</sup> We will again meet this idea below in the context of the mutual effectivity between man and nature and man and history. Walldorf has outlined the fundamental significance of the analogy of all creaturely being for Schlatter's critically realistic epistemology in *Realistische Philosophie*, 133-41. See also Kindt, *Gedanke der Einheit*, 129-30; Neuer, *Zusammenhang*, 63; *idem*, "Introduction *Metaphysik*," 10.

<sup>14</sup> *Metaphysik*, 46.



ever, that Schlatter does not have a doctrine of the *imago Dei* in the specific sense of Gen 1:27. Rather, as we shall see in a few moments, he reflects and develops every ontological characteristic of man with recourse to God-relatedness, which is ontologically constitutive of the human creature. Put differently, human personhood, corporeity and sociality are not co-ordinated with, and on the same level as, human God-relatedness.<sup>15</sup> Rather, what is true ontologically is applied as a noetic principle. In his discussion of the question as to why man is continuously creating false images of God, Schlatter states: "We human beings cannot do without God. If we want to be human beings we must find God, for we cannot come to ourselves if we do not come to God. The coming to ourselves [*Einkehr bei uns selbst*] and the remembrance of God are indissolubly bound to each other."<sup>16</sup> *God's relation to and action upon man, which are ontologically constitutive of human being, provide the conceptual basis without which Schlatter's anthropology as an ontology of human creatureliness would instantly collapse.* We could therefore say that Schlatter's anthropology is an *applied doctrine of the imago Dei*.

## B. Human personhood

### i. The ontological dependence of the human person upon God

In Schlatter's view, personhood is the fundamental characteristic of human being which distinguishes man from the impersonal sphere of creation.<sup>17</sup> The three structural

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<sup>15</sup> Neuer (*Zusammenhang*, 148-50) and Walldorf (*Realistische Philosophie*, 236-244) also argue for the human God-relatedness as the fundamental category of Schlatter's anthropology.

<sup>16</sup> "Kreuz Jesu," 7. See also Walldorf, *Realistische Philosophie*, 236-44.

<sup>17</sup> See *Dogma*, 20. Schlatter links his concept of the person with that of the spirit so that the human spirit makes the person (see e.g. *Dogma*, 30, 38-49, 82). See further Neuer, *Zusammenhang*, 142; Walldorf, *Realistische Philosophie*, 230 n. 16.

characteristics of the person are knowing, acting and unity.<sup>18</sup> Schlatter's understanding of these terms can be summarised as follows:

- a) The person has a self-consciousness, that means the ability to differentiate between the "I" and the "Not-I" (subject and object). Through this differentiation, man is able to know.
- b) The person has the capacity to act in the form of conscious thinking, willing and acting, which includes human freedom.
- c) The person is marked by the unity of consciousness. The manifold acts and uncountable processes of consciousness are embraced by a unity which gives wholeness [*Ganzheit*] to the person.<sup>19</sup>

Each characteristic of human personhood is realised in the mutual interplay of the three personal functions of thinking, feeling and volition.<sup>20</sup>

The three ontological characteristics above indicate that Schlatter develops a substantial concept of personhood. The human person *is* a homogeneous self capable of free and self-determined action.<sup>21</sup> Yet the person can only be a person by means of a set of relations through which man *becomes* what he is. Schlatter indicates this aspect when he concludes the section on personhood by defining the life of the person as the mutuality of being and becoming.

Therefore, we call that which we find in ourselves as the given [*uns Gegebene*] neither only being – this would only be identity without self-differentiation, only immutability [*Beharren*] without flexibility [*Beweglichkeit*] – nor only becoming – this would only be the transition into another and a second, without unity. We are – for in the second we are also the first, in the new the same. We become – for we are not merely the first but also the second and the unity which binds the two together. Because we are in such a way that we become, and become in such a way that we are, therefore we live."<sup>22</sup>

<sup>18</sup> See *Briefe*, 36. Schlatter develops these three characteristics in *Dogma*, 22-25.

<sup>19</sup> This summary is taken from Neuer, *Zusammenhang*, 141-42. See also Walldorf, *Realistische Philosophie*, 227-28.

<sup>20</sup> See *Dogma*, 89-124 (thinking), 124-47 (feeling), 148-98 (volition). For the mutuality of volition and thinking see e.g. *Dogma*, 93-96, 162-63; *Ethik*, 249. For the role of human feelings see e.g. *Dogma*, 125; *Ethik*, 321; *Gründe*, 40-41. For the mutual strengthening or weakening of all three functions see *Ethik*, 375-76. Schlatter emphasises that any imbalance in the mutuality and interdependence of the three personal functions leads to either a rationalistic, voluntaristic, or eudemonistic concept of personhood (see *Metaphysik*, 32-36; cf. Neuer, *Zusammenhang*, 144; Walldorf, *Realistische Philosophie*, 157).

<sup>21</sup> See also Neuer, *Zusammenhang*, 142, 356 n. 24. He points out that this understanding of personhood stands in line with the traditional Western approach which was significantly shaped by the Boethian definition of the person as "*rationalis naturae individua substantia*." However, as Neuer underlines and as we have already suggested, Schlatter rejects any rationalistic concept of personhood. For his explicit critique see e.g. *Dogma*, 145-46; *Philosophische Arbeit*, 19, 250; *Furcht vor dem Denken*, 51; *Gründe*, 20. For further references see Walldorf, *Realistische Philosophie*, 216 n. 7.

<sup>22</sup> *Dogma*, 25.

We shall come to man's relation to nature, as the impersonal sphere of creation, and fellow man in due course. For the moment we need to focus on God's relation to and action upon man by means of which the human person comes into being. Schlatter expounds:

He [God] is the one through whom we are persons. That means: he is the generator [*Erzeuger*] of knowledge, of power, and of the unity that embraces manifoldness. We cannot equate the one through whom we are with us. For we have received that which we are not able to create. Our originator [*Urheber*] is able to do what we cannot do. For he gave us knowledge, power and life.<sup>23</sup>

Schlatter specifies the notion of God as Creator of the human person when he elaborates that the characteristics of personhood are created through, and grounded in, God's personal being. He articulates his view in negative terms:

"'God is dead.' The one who believes that knows: 'I am dead also.' All three characteristics of personal life – knowing, acting and unity – are consequently gone. We will not be able to preserve our knowing, acting and being-one [*Einssein*] if we originate from the not-knowing, not-acting and in-plurality-separated world cause [*in Vielheit zerteilten Weltgrund*]."<sup>24</sup>

In other words, God's life, knowing, causal power, unity and freedom bring forth the life, knowing, acting, unity and freedom of the human person.<sup>25</sup> God's thinking, willing and blessedness create human thinking, willing and feeling.<sup>26</sup> "[F]or God's work is the first one, the creative one, the ground of our whole capacity [*Vermögen*]."<sup>27</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>24</sup> *Briefe*, 36-37. Similarly in *Dogma*, 29; *Andachten*, 417-18; "Heilige Geschichte," 223; "Gottes Söhne," 10-11.

<sup>25</sup> See *Dogma*, 34-36, 155-56.

<sup>26</sup> See *ibid.*, 35-36, 97-99, 138-39, 149-50, 154-57, 175-77, 178, 180.

<sup>27</sup> *Ethik*, 77. Without going into much detail, we encounter here a central point of Schlatter's critique of Schleiermacher's theology. According to Schlatter, man's dependence must not be limited to a certain part of human life: "Not only something in us but *we* are made through a causation [*Verursachung*] that stands above us" (*Dogma*, 24). Instead of isolating feeling as the area in which man experiences his dependence upon God, Schlatter elaborates that man in the totality of his being and life – even in his most active and productive functions – is dependent upon God (see e.g. *Dogma*, 24, 558 n. 17; *Philosophische Arbeit*, 236). In antithesis to the Schleiermachian tradition, we see Schlatter actually performing what Bailer calls a "totalisation of Schleiermacher's approach." For a deeper investigation of these issues see Bailer, *Prinzip*, 66-74; and Rieger, *Rechtfertigungslehre*, 263-74. For a similar refusal to isolate a certain characteristic of human being "as the locus at which experience of the Word of God is possible" see Barth, *Church Dogmatics* 1. 1, 201-04. "We may quietly regard the will and conscience and feeling and all other possible anthropological centres as possibilities of human self-determination and then understand them in their totality as determined by the Word of God which affects the whole man" (202).

## ii. *Creatio ex nihilo*

The material just outlined brings two interrelated aspects of Schlatter's notion of creation to the fore. First, creation is a one-sided, transcendental and all-powerful act of God. We encounter here a concept of God's exclusive mono-activity (*Alleinwirksamkeit*). God's creative action "takes place without us – not only without our co-operation but also without our knowing."<sup>28</sup> God's creative agency means: "He reigns, He forms [*gestaltet*], He begins." Schlatter speaks of "the majesty of the divine creating which seizes us as a forming power . . . [and] transcends our thinking and willing with the reigning power of a will that does not ask us."<sup>29</sup>

Since God gave us causal power, he has revealed himself to us as the one who possesses the force to cause [*Kraft zum Wirken*]. Because he has this as the One in whom there is no division, his acting is creative, a complete causality. God's force does not stand beside his Word; rather, his Word is his force. Through this the idea of creation is given to us. At this point we reach the limits of our capacity to see. For the perception of origination and becoming is nowhere granted to us. We see only that which has come about [*Entstandenes*] – only the results of acting. Even the processes of becoming, which take place within ourselves, are completely veiled to us. We are therefore unable to develop a creation theory . . . . Because we are not Creator we neither see nor comprehend a creative act, for where our vocation ends there also ends our perception and comprehension.<sup>30</sup>

Schlatter summarises his concept of God's act of creation in this context through the term *creatio ex nihilo*. "The meaning of the formula is to outline God's causality as complete."<sup>31</sup>

In Schlatter, the transcendence and superiority of divine creative action go hand in hand with the human incapacity to perceive and comprehend an act of creation. A creative act is a miracle and a mystery.<sup>32</sup> This explains why Schlatter does not further outline ex-

<sup>28</sup> *Dogma*, 350-51.

<sup>29</sup> "Unterwerfung," 8; similarly in *Jesus und Paulus*, 105.

<sup>30</sup> *Dogma*, 36. The idea of the unity of God's creative power and Word is central to Schlatter's concept of divine agency and will come into focus at a later point (see e.g. *Johannes*, 3; *Erläuterungen I*, 604-05; "Jesus und wir heutigen Menschen," 209; "Wunder der Bibel," 72).

<sup>31</sup> \**Dogmatik I*, 194. Cf. *Erläuterungen III*, 436.

<sup>32</sup> See e.g. *Dogma*, 462; *Gründe*, 30-31, 71; *Dienst*, 46; *Andachten*, 381; *Opfer*, 24; *Marienreden*, 8; "Glaube und Geschichte," 347; "Wunder der Bibel," 72-73, 75; "Neue Testament," 109; "Jesus und wir heutigen Menschen," 212; "Fröhlichs Traktat," 280-81. Because of the incomprehensibility of a creative act Schlatter refuses to develop any kind of creation theory which tries to explain the causal joint, that is, the point at which a divine or inner-worldly cause brings forth an effect. The causal factors and the processes of

actly how personhood is created. The creative act, as the moment in which the personal characteristics and functions of man are called into being, cannot be observed. Yet, the incomprehensibility of the "How" questions neither the "That" of God's creative action nor the "Who" of Creator and creature.<sup>33</sup> Schlatter argues that the creation, as the result and product of God's creative action, discloses something of the Creator and his activity. "Our task is to perceive what has come about. The knowledge about the cause, which generates it, and the ground, which carries it, is disclosed to us as far as the characteristics of that which has become [*des Gewordenen*] make its origin known."<sup>34</sup> How, then, does the human person, as the product of God's creative activity, inform Schlatter's understanding of creation as an act of God? The answer to this question brings us to the second aspect of Schlatter's approach.

The existence of creation – the fact that human or non-human creatures have being – indicates that the divine act of creation has been successful and is completed. Schlatter, we may say, takes the notion of *creatio ex nihilo* seriously when he refrains from understanding it as a divine activity extended in time. Although the act of creation includes the creation of the spatio-temporal continuum, the act itself, like all divine actions, "does not happen within time."<sup>35</sup> On this basis Schlatter refutes the idea of *creatio continua*, for it undermines the perfection of God's creative power and leads to an unbiblical ontological actualism thereby thwarting the particularity and indelible value of creaturely being.

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becoming, which bring about and mark creaturely existence and life, constitute a mystery which Schlatter wants to respect (see e.g. *Dogma*, 46-47, 55, 60-61, 96; *Ethik*, 264-66, 279; *Metaphysik*, 61; *Briefe*, 27-29; *Rückblick*, 54).

<sup>33</sup> In general, Schlatter gives primacy to being over knowing, to the actuality of events over man's rational constructability of the same. Thus, he underlines: "The inexplicability of the 'How' does not shake the 'That'" (*Philosophische Arbeit*, 43). "The fact [*Faktum*] must be lord over our thoughts, not vice versa" (*\*Wesen und Quellen*, 7; cf. *ibid.*, 121-22). See also *Dogma*, 61; *Briefe*, 38; Walldorf, *Realistische Philosophie*, 143.

<sup>34</sup> "Glaube und Geschichte," 347; similarly in "Wort und Schrift," 33.

<sup>35</sup> *Metaphysik* 72. Schlatter argues that the causal timelessness applies – albeit only to a lesser measure – also to creaturely causes.

The formula that the existence of the world comes about through its continuous creation is to be removed, for it makes the origin [*Entstehung*] and the existence of the world doubtful. What must be created over and over again has never been created. Here the act is not described in such a way as to reach its goal and find its completion in it.<sup>36</sup>

Therefore, creation means that God truly creates and establishes something which is other than himself, namely creature and not Creator. This moment of God's creative activity is most clearly displayed in the creation of the human person.

The one world cause [*Weltgrund*], who embraces everything, is also the Creator of our thinking and willing, not only the worker [*Wirker*] of nature but also the Lord of the human persons [*Geister*]. He endows the latter with a life peculiar to themselves [*einem ihnen eignenden Leben*] so that his working [*Wirken*] reveals itself as giving and his will as goodness.<sup>37</sup>

Schlatter's substantial concept of personhood must therefore be understood as the result of his notion of God's creative action. It is precisely in creating the human person as a homogeneous self capable of free and self-determined action that the perfection of the divine creativity is revealed. Along these lines Schlatter reflects on human volition and freedom:

In that the power of affirmation and choice over our will is given to us, we experience that *God's creating is meant seriously and does not merely create apparition but rather life*. He cares about us. Therefore, our will is handed over to us in order that we have it as our own product (emphasis A. L.).<sup>38</sup>

### C. Human corporeity and the gift of space and time

In Schlatter, embodiment is the second ontological characteristic of human being. Thus man is given two different modes of being [*Seinsweisen*]: personal life (spirit) and bodily life (nature). Our primary interest here lies not in the way Schlatter relates both as distinct yet related.<sup>39</sup> Rather, we want to focus on his idea that God, in creating man as corporeal being, brings forth and enables human life.

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<sup>36</sup> *Dogma*, 37.

<sup>37</sup> *Gründe*, 29.

<sup>38</sup> *Dogma*, 149. See also *ibid.*, 30, 177.

<sup>39</sup> For this see Neuer, *Zusammenhang*, 123-33, 145-46; Walldorf, *Realistische Philosophie*, 230-33.

i. The creation and enabling of human being and action through nature

For Schlatter, the body is the "the greatest thing given to him [man] as his own . . . the work of the Creator."<sup>40</sup> Man *is* a corporeal being. "Nothing happens apart from the body, for the individual does not live separate from the body."<sup>41</sup> Through his body man is part of nature. The relation and interaction of man and nature is a mutual one. "Nature seizes us and moves us; we seize and move nature. We are subject to its effects and at the same time exercise effects on it."<sup>42</sup> This is to say that, on the one hand, nature constitutes and determines man. With regard to the exercise of the three personal functions, Schlatter expounds: "Neither in our thinking nor in our act of volition is anything else given to us except the unity of nature and spirit. Thinking collapses without the sensory functions as does volition without the instincts given to us through nature."<sup>43</sup> In a similar way "nature gives us happiness through the manifold sensations that take their rise from it."<sup>44</sup> In his capacity for free and self-determined action man is also dependent upon his body. "Everything we bear within ourselves pertaining to our capacity to act; whether our worship or our service performed for others; whether our knowledge and love for God or our kindness toward men, is tied to our bodily organs."<sup>45</sup> Thus, Schlatter underlines that it is nature "through which we become and in which we live," and that "nature is our mother and makes us."<sup>46</sup>

On the other hand, man is empowered through his body to actuate and realise his capacity for free and self-determined action. "The human body is . . . the instrument through

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<sup>40</sup> *Romans*, 41. In *Opfer*, 30 Schlatter states "that the body belongs to that which is from God."

<sup>41</sup> *Romans*, 142.

<sup>42</sup> *Dogma*, 39; similarly *ibid.*, 40, 48; *Metaphysik*, 37, 55, 84.

<sup>43</sup> *Dogma*, 48.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>45</sup> *Theology of the Apostles*, 205. See also "Natur, Sünde und Gnade," 50: "We can only act in and through nature. Flight from nature means the renunciation of acting."

<sup>46</sup> *Dogma*, 15; *Ethik*, 84 (in above order); cf. *Andachten*, 302.

which we are capable of action."<sup>47</sup> The Creator thus empowers the human creature to act physically. Schlatter speaks of an extension of man's "sphere of power" [*Machtbereich*] in this connection. "We are not only conscious and capable of ourselves [*unserer selbst mächtig*] but also of our body and through it of an infinity of things. There are organs prepared for our acting; for what is produced by nature becomes our co-worker [*Mitwirkler*] through its connectedness with us."<sup>48</sup>

Important for our purposes is Schlatter's idea that the interaction between man and nature is grounded in God's action. For God created man and nature. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth; you are God's creature and live in God's creation."<sup>49</sup> Thereby God establishes an analogy of being between man and nature on the basis of which their interaction becomes possible. The unity of the distinct spheres of creation manifests itself in the metaphysical categories which ontologically mark all creaturely being.<sup>50</sup> However, for Schlatter it is not only a single and initial act by which God enables the interaction between man and nature. Rather, God continues to rule nature through the "intelligible powers" which he has established in it. These powers are number, law, type and purpose.<sup>51</sup> Schlatter holds that nature "has a spirit [*ein Geistiges*] within itself who forms it and without whom it neither exists nor ever causes [*wirkt*]. The intelligible in nature makes

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<sup>47</sup> *Paulus der Bote*, 553. See also *Ethik*, 380; *Opfer*, 27.

<sup>48</sup> *Dogma*, 40. Schlatter uses the term "organ" in this context in order to show that body and nature are not merely instruments but have their own life [*Eigenleben*]. It is precisely through the realisation and actuation of this life, not in contradiction to it, that the organ stands in the service of a higher act and purpose. For man's action upon and in nature see also *ibid.*, 159, 161; *Ethik*, 382.

<sup>49</sup> "Wort und Schrift," 28. For nature as the product of God's creative action see also *Dogma*, 51-57; "Idealismus oder Theologie," 357, 371; "Herr hat gegeben," 114-15; *Gründe*, 54; *Opfer*, 30; "Natur, Sünde und Gnade," 63.

<sup>50</sup> Walldorf has outlined this aspect in detail in *Realistische Philosophie*, 138-39. For an in-depth study of Schlatter's metaphysics see *ibid.*, 146-213.

<sup>51</sup> See especially *Dogma*, 40-41, 52-58. For a detailed exposition of these four intelligible powers see Walldorf, *Realistische Philosophie*, 244-51. For the relation of the intelligible structures and the metaphysical categories see *ibid.*, 138-41.



it a witness to God."<sup>52</sup> As the Creator and ruler of nature, God enables the mutual effecting between man and nature.

Since we honour God as our Creator we do not seek him without nature, either by veiling nature from us or by trying to break it. Likewise we do not merely see the natural processes, the things and the laws forming them. Rather, above the things and their regular [*gesetzmäßigen*] movement we have the God, who rules them, before our eyes. Therefore, we direct our thinking and acting towards nature in the conviction that it – from its origin through the God who creates it – is receptive to our action upon it and brings forth the success which is prepared through our acting.<sup>53</sup>

From the material just outlined Schlatter draws a conclusion which is crucial for our attempt to understand his notion of divine action: it is ultimately God who creates and rules man *through* nature. "It [nature] is God's work and conceived [*gedacht*] and ruled by him so that the divine giving is mediated to us through its act."<sup>54</sup> Put differently: "Nature stands before us in the dignity of the divine work as the medium through which God makes and governs us." We are "set into our body and nature in such a way that God makes and rules us through them."<sup>55</sup>

## ii. The divine gift of space and time

In close connection to Schlatter's concept of human embodiment stands his idea that God gives space and time to the human creature. "The one who has made us is the one who grants us space and time."<sup>56</sup> Both are – like man – created by God and consequently to be affirmed as the mode of being given to man. What interests us here is how Schlatter outlines space and time as the gifts of God through which he enables man to be a personal and

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<sup>52</sup> *Dogma*, 52; similarly in *Gründe*, 54.

<sup>53</sup> *Ethik*, 381-82.

<sup>54</sup> *Dogma*, 57.

<sup>55</sup> *Ethik*, 253, 329 (in above order); similarly *ibid.*, 51, 295-96; *Dogma*, 57; "Natur, Sünde und Gnade," 50; *Erlebtes*, 116; "Grenzen der kirchlichen Gemeinschaft," 5; "Wunder," 831.

<sup>56</sup> *Dogma*, 49.

free agent.<sup>57</sup> According to Schlatter, space is the basis for the efficacious power of the universe as well as for the human capacity for free and self-determined action.<sup>58</sup> Because the human being is a corporeal being, space is the mode of human existence through and in which man relates to the objects and persons around him. As we saw a few moments ago, Schlatter is aware that corporeality (spatial existence) conditions and limits human action. Yet it is precisely because of the bodily mode of being that man exercises the power to cause effects. Through space the contact is established by which an action is transferred as an effect upon another person or object.<sup>59</sup> In short: in giving space, God enables man to realise his creaturely capacity for free and self-determined action.

Time is, as Schlatter puts it, "even more closely connected with the causal event because we see the succession in the transmission of the movement from the one being moved to the other."<sup>60</sup> Schlatter is aware that human causal power is conditioned and weakened by time – for the effect and success of an action are not established instantly but require time. Schlatter speaks of "the blockage between the causal action and the action which is caused by it through a time that lies between both."<sup>61</sup> Human causal power cannot skip over this space in time. Yet without time, human action would not be true action because time gives an effect of an action its duration and thus its success and fruit.<sup>62</sup> We may say that God, the Creator of time, gives time to man and thus enables the same to be and live in the way God intended human being and life.

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<sup>57</sup> For a profound exposition of Schlatter's concept of space and time see Walldorf, *Realistische Philosophie*, 193-98.

<sup>58</sup> See *Metaphysik*, 70-71.

<sup>59</sup> See *ibid.*, 68.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 71. Similarly in "Zwei Scharen von Hoffenden," 323.

<sup>62</sup> See *Metaphysik*, 72-73.

#### D. Human sociality and history

##### i. The creation and enabling of human being and action through community

In Schlatter's view, human sociality and communality should not be regarded as merely supplementary products of already complete individuals who decide to live together, e.g. on the basis of a contract. Rather, "community is the creation of God in the same way as man is, who does not come about in any other way than through community."<sup>63</sup> In other words, man as personal and corporeal being is placed in different communities such as family, society or state, and religious communities – all of which are ontologically constitutive of human being. "We do not have our lives as isolated beings but only as members of the community out of which we come into being and for which we live."<sup>64</sup> Schlatter specifies the meaning of this statement in terms of the dependence of the individual person upon the community. Through the marriage and family of his parents, man inherits his bodily as well as his spiritual life.<sup>65</sup> Through the language of the community, man receives the ability to think and is open to the thoughts of another person.<sup>66</sup> Man receives his own will and the motives for his acting and volition from his fellow man.<sup>67</sup> Human community is also the soil of feeling such as the sharing of joy, compassion, honour, shame, etc.<sup>68</sup> In sum:

[N]othing takes place in our soul without the assistance of the community, from the first condition for all activity, from life which the parents have brought forth and for which society passes all the provisions, up to the most personal achievements of our own thinking and volition in our service for God, we always work with what we have received; think with those thoughts that are given to us; speak

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<sup>63</sup> *Dogma*, 61; similarly *ibid.*, 20; *Gründe*, 60; *Philosophische Arbeit*, 193. The primordial mutuality of individuality and community, unity and plurality will be examined in connection with Schlatter's idea of the *vestigia trinitatis*.

<sup>64</sup> *Dogma*, 20. Cf. *ibid.*, 61.

<sup>65</sup> See *ibid.*, 61-63; *Gründe*, 58.

<sup>66</sup> See *Dogma*, 63; *Gründe*, 57.

<sup>67</sup> See *Dogma*, 61, 63-64; *Gründe*, 58.

<sup>68</sup> See *Dogma*, 127-31; *Gründe*, 57-58.

those words which are told us; will that will which the community awakens in us, and act in that power which it [the community] has stored for us.<sup>69</sup>

As we have seen to be the case with nature, it is ultimately God who creates the human being through community: "God reveals himself to us not as the Creator of individuals but as the Creator and Lord of his kingdom because he makes us through the community and for the community."<sup>70</sup> In a roundabout way, man as personal and corporeal being is not only dependent upon and constituted by the community but also establishes it by acting upon and in it.

In that he [man] has completed his will through action, it [the will] has become unrepealable and irrevocable, acts back upon the doer, and determines his will as well as his condition. He has instituted community with others by making his will the cause of their experiences. Through this history has emerged – the life history of the individual, whose actions and experiences are combined into a unity through a causal concatenation, the history of the small and big communities, and, finally that of humankind, the movement of which is determined through our actions.<sup>71</sup>

Adolf Köberle aptly summarises the relational dimension as one of the distinctive features of Schlatter's anthropology.

When Schlatter thinks about man as metaphysical mystery, then he is above all concerned with the sociological structure of our historical existence. Long before Martin Buber, Ferdinand Ebner and Friedrich Gogarten, this Christian dogmatician started to fight resolutely against the Cartesian loneliness-thinking [*Ich-Einsamkeitsdenken*] and pointed out how man lives creationally embedded in I-Thou relationships and in all kinds of orders of encounter [*Begegnungsordnungen aller Art*].<sup>72</sup>

<sup>69</sup> *Ethik*, 55. Cf. *ibid.*, 108; "Glaube und Geschichte," 343. For a more comprehensive outline of this subject see Neuer, *Zusammenhang*, 146-48; Walldorf, *Realistische Philosophie*, 233-35.

<sup>70</sup> *Dogma*, 20.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 158. See also *ibid.*, 68. Human corporeity makes the interaction with nature as well as with other people possible. "Our body is the strong bond through which we are placed in [*hineingesenkt*] nature. Thus, it [the body] also mediates our partaking in the history which takes place around us" (*Opfer*, 27). Corporeity is therefore the ground from which community, culture, and history emerge. See *Dogma*, 54; "Natur, Sünde und Gnade," 50. Klaus Bockmühl, whose theology is significantly influenced by Schlatter's work, seems to articulate the same idea in the following statement: "[C]orporeality becomes not only the field of man's *sociality*, but also, regarding his ability to act, his 'authority to act,' the field where *history* becomes possible: human embodiment becomes the scene of ethics" ("Die Leiblichkeit des Menschen," 69; emphasis Bockmühl).

<sup>72</sup> Köberle, "Adolf Schlatter," 88. See also Walldorf, *Realistische Philosophie*, 233-35.

ii. The creation and enabling of human being and action through history

We have seen that the three characteristics of personhood, corporeity and sociality are ontologically constitutive of man as a free agent or, as Schlatter calls it, "originator of effects."<sup>73</sup> Schlatter uses terms such as "causal capacity," "causal power," "power of action," and "production power of the person" in order to articulate this concept.<sup>74</sup> Through his actions man is related to fellow man but also to the people prior to and after him. For Schlatter this is the point at which community and history emerge. "Because the event goes over from the generator of the effect to its recipient, we live in community, and therefore our life is the product [*Erzeugnis*] and the producer [*Erzeuger*] of history."<sup>75</sup> Both history and community cannot be separated. "When we speak of history we must appropriate the concept of community and say that those who lived before us made our lives possible, and that we have made possible the lives of those who are born from us. The community generates actual, effective causal relations."<sup>76</sup>

In Schlatter, man's relation to history is of the same mutual character as man's relation to community. Man generates history and vice versa.<sup>77</sup>

[H]istory has its origin in the inner sphere of man – in his will – and comes about through his action. The productive power of the person appears in it. Hence its efficaciousness is not limited to the material side of our life only, but reaches into the most inner and spiritual dimension and shapes our person. Therefore, the new arises in history according to the forming power of the person, and this new is blessing or curse – furtherance or hindrance of those who follow.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>73</sup> See *Dogma*, 22-24.

<sup>74</sup> See e.g. *Metaphysik*, 87; *Dogma*, 36, 82, 148, 150, 175, 206, 262; *Theology of the Apostles*, 133, 135.

<sup>75</sup> "Selbstdarstellungen," 160.

<sup>76</sup> "Glaube und Geschichte," 343. Cf. *Church in the New Testament Period*, 1; "Wort und Schrift," 28.

<sup>77</sup> See *Dogma*, 83.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 82. Cf. *ibid.*, 85, 172; "Heilige Geschichte," 216-17, 221-22, 226-27; "Glaube und Geschichte," 348. It is in this context that Schlatter accentuates the mysteriousness and incomprehensibility of history (see *Dogma*, 83, 154; "Heilige Geschichte," 220-21). In "Paulus und das Griechentum" he speaks of the "incomprehensible positivity of which historical research is aware" (143).

The groundedness of history in the conscious and self-determined action of the human person makes it distinct from the impersonal realm of nature. "[I]n nature the force is the mover; in history, however, it is the will. The force reveals itself in effects, and of such consists nature. The will, however, reveals itself in action, and of such consists history."<sup>79</sup>

As already suggested, man does not only bring forth history but is also dependent upon, and constituted by, it. "[O]ur life comes about through the life of those who live before us, our thought comes about through the thought of those who think before us, [and] our work comes about through the work of those who act before us."<sup>80</sup> The laws of history make it possible for an action which took place in the past to affect man and determine his bodily and spiritual existence. According to Schlatter, man is subject to the physical, logical, ethical and religious laws of history.<sup>81</sup> As distinct as history may be from nature, through these laws and structures it is also similar to nature.

Through the strong causal relations which rule the course of history, the same is similar to a natural process. Therefore, that which comes out of our inner life is put out of our freedom's reach and interwoven with natural events which bring it [that which comes out of our inner life] close to the stability and impregnability of natural processes. What has been done cannot be undone just as natural laws cannot be broken.<sup>82</sup>

In all this, history is the work of God. God creates and enables history, so to speak, indirectly through man, whom he has created as personal, corporeal and socio-historical being. God not only creates but also rules history. For Schlatter the laws and structures of history make clear "that the effects of our freedom and sin always remain embraced by the divine governance."<sup>83</sup> It is by means of this ruling activity that God makes the interaction between man and history possible. According to Schlatter, "the community, which unites us in spite

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<sup>79</sup> "Heilige Geschichte," 217. See also "Glaube und Geschichte," 339-40.

<sup>80</sup> *Ethik*, 108-09.

<sup>81</sup> See *Dogma*, 82. Space does not allow us to explore Schlatter's thought in detail. For this we refer to Neuer, *Zusammenhang*, 163-65.

<sup>82</sup> *Dogma*, 82. See also *ibid.*, 157-58; *Philosophische Arbeit* 19; "Heilige Geschichte," 222.

<sup>83</sup> *Ethik*, 108.

of the stretching of time, comes about through the divine acting. We are reminded of the latter through its [history's] laws, the overarching relation in which the events following each other stand to each other."<sup>84</sup> Schlatter expounds "that the course of the world [*Weltlauf*] is governed by God's will in such a way that it [*Weltlauf*] creates the space for our acting and preserves the fruits of our work." This conviction "constitutes the indispensable precondition for our active participation in history."<sup>85</sup>

What applies to nature is therefore also true about history. Because God creates and rules history, he is the one who places man in history, that is, he creates, forms, rules and guides man through history.<sup>86</sup>

## E. On being the image of God

### i. Relationship with God

In the following sentences Schlatter provides a pertinent summary of what we have examined thus far. The God made visible through Jesus is the God, "who is the Creator, the giver of our space and our time, the former [*Bildner*] of our body and our earth, also the ruler of our history and the worker [*Wirker*] of our community, which joins our life together, who, because he is the Creator of all this, is also its completer . . . "<sup>87</sup> The relational figure inherent in the notion of God as the one "from whom and to whom all things are" entails two aspects when it is applied to man. Schlatter articulates the first aspect as follows: "From him we receive everything we possess, and through him we are what we are.

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<sup>84</sup> *Dogma*, 85.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 160-61.

<sup>86</sup> See *ibid.*, 16, 85, 516; *Ethik*, 51, 83-85, 108-09, 256-58, 261, 279, 296; *Erlebtes*, 51, 116; "Grenzen der kirchlichen Gemeinschaft," 5.

<sup>87</sup> "Jesus unsere Hoffnung," 310

This is the giving and creative will of God."<sup>88</sup> We have presented this aspect as the *ontological relatedness* of the creature to the Creator. Because of God's creative action upon (and relation to) the creature, the latter is God's image in a substantial and indelible manner. With regard to man, this means for Schlatter that "we have to find the God-likeness," of which Gen 1:27 speaks, "in the empirical man."<sup>89</sup> Hence, it comes as no surprise that Schlatter links his concept of man as a personal self, capable of free and self-determined action, explicitly with the idea of *imago Dei*: "Through his power to rule, man is the image of God, not the image of the devil" and "participates, according to the measure of the creature, in the royal autonomy [*Selbständigkeit*] and freedom of God"<sup>90</sup> The human person as a free corporeal and social agent *is* the image of God, who, in his transcendence and sovereignty, creates and rules the creature.

However, the ontological relatedness of man is only the first aspect of the statement that everything is from and to God. Schlatter presents the second aspect as follows: "We are for him and to him; that is the moving [*bewegende*] will of God, the will that sets our goal, the will that carries us forward and upward."<sup>91</sup> Man is purposively created towards a *personal God-relationship* which transcends the *God-relatedness* characteristic of every creature.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> *Opfer*, 3.

<sup>89</sup> \**Genesis*, 37; cf. *ibid.*, 42. Schlatter bases his argument also on Gen 9:6.

<sup>90</sup> "Natur, Sünde und Gnade," 56; "Wille," 826 (in above order).

<sup>91</sup> *Opfer*, 3.

<sup>92</sup> According to Schlatter, the religions are phenomena of this teleological orientation (see e.g. *Dogma*, 198-203; "Kreuz Jesu," 7-14; \**Wesen und Quellen*, 112-20). In this context Schlatter considers the term "natural religion" which "is not to say that we are born with the God-consciousness as comprehended knowledge or complete will, but rather that through the organisation that constitutes us, we are caused to ask for God" (*Dogma*, 28-29). Yet, because of the distinction of God-relatedness and God-relationship Schlatter expounds that the term "natural religion" should not be used. To know something about God does not automatically mean religion as relationship with God (see *Dogma*, 29). Walldorf expresses Schlatter's notion by using the terms "latent God-consciousness" [*latentes Gottesbewusstsein*] and "non-thematic awareness [*unthematisches Gewahrsein*]" in which the self, world, and God are still undifferentiated" (idem, *Realistische Philoso-*



However, there is still something greater than being a creature. James, like the other apostles, has called this 'something greater' the sonship of God (*Kindschaft Gottes*). When he calls us 'creature' he is saying: our existence consists with everything it comprises through God's power. When he calls us 'children born of God' he is saying: God puts in your inner, personal life communion [*Verbundenheit*] with him.<sup>93</sup>

In this personal God-relationship the human creature does not merely receive life but lives it in personal response to God; lives it for God, thereby offering to God what has been received. This teleological orientation of humankind to become children of God is grounded in the fact that God created man as a personal and free agent. Schlatter explains:

[T]he difference between nature and spirit results in a different presence and mode of activity of God here and there. For nature is merely shaped. The spirit, however, is shaped in order to shape himself. Therefore, the analogy which describes the divine action in relation to the human persons [*Geister*] is 'reign' [*Regierung*]. Through this term we say that the intrinsic value of our personal life is continuously affirmed and established through the divine activity.<sup>94</sup>

God wills to be in a relationship with man in which the latter participates and exists in propriety to his personal being, to his being-other than God. For Schlatter, this implies that God grants man the capacity for action, that is, causal power within the Creator-creature relationship: "That a right before God is given to us, is the creation of the divine love and stems from the fact that it [the divine love] values us. Hence, our will is even before God a causal power. His love ascribes the task to us in which our service for God consists."<sup>95</sup>

This is the context in which Schlatter argues for the distinctness of man's relationship with God. The impersonal sphere of creation is, from the beginning, placed in a complete relationship with God so that it, so to speak, automatically and necessarily fulfils its purpose and glorifies its Creator. "The creature is bound in the necessity which is laid upon it."<sup>96</sup> Whereas this interrelation and interaction is appropriate to the nature of impersonal

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phie, 243). Based on these considerations we cannot agree with Irmgard Kindt's rather misleading statement that Schlatter justifies the usage of the term "natural religion" (*Gedanke der Einheit*, 30).

<sup>93</sup> *Andachten*, 197. Cf. *Dogma*, 38-39; "Anteil," 302.

<sup>94</sup> *Dogma*, 37; \**Dogmatik I*, 124: "We are known by God and at the same time knowing; the things are only known."

<sup>95</sup> *Dogma*, 197. Similarly *ibid.*, 149; *Theology of the Apostles*, 133.

<sup>96</sup> *Andachten*, 372.

being, the fact that God created man as a personal being rules out any automatism in his relationship with man. Schlatter illustrates this through the idea of temptation: "The stars are not tempted. They run their course in perfect correctness, bound to the law given to them. I am tempted because God's gift is given to me in such a way that it becomes my property."<sup>97</sup> The *proprium* of the relationship between God and man is this: "The community that God grants us with himself lays claim to our own will because God imparts to us personal life through his grace . . . and makes the success of his community with us dependent on our behaviour."<sup>98</sup> Schlatter leaves no doubt that he regards divine sonship (*Kindschaft*) as the relationship which transcends the relatedness of impersonal creatures to their Creator.

The creature stands in dependence upon God even if it does not know him. The child, however, knows the Father. The creature must do the will of God even if it neither knows nor wills it. The child, however, serves God through its own will and in its own obedience. For this reason we are made children of God through the Word of truth.<sup>99</sup>

To sum up: Man's purposive relatedness and orientation towards God is fully realised and complete in the personal relationship of divine sonship. "I am his creature, but to be his child is more than being his creature. Sonship [*Kindschaft*] is not merely dependence on God's power, but also participation [*Anteil*] in God's life."<sup>100</sup> Within this relationship man lives his life and exercises his creaturely capacities in personal and volitional response to the Creator, thereby imaging the one from whom he has received his creaturely existence and being.

Only then are we receptive to the Christian idea of God, when we understand causation in such a way as to bring forth community and make the recipient of the effect the image and witness of the one who causes him [the recipient]. Then, in the affirmation of the one who calls the world into being, community with him is given to us. Hence, our whole work is based upon our receiving, our freedom upon our dependence, and therefore the goal which determines our whole thinking and willing arises out of

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 367. The distinctness of man's relationship to and glorification of the Creator is a central theme in Peter Brunner's essay "Die Freiheit des Menschen." See especially p. 114 where the affinity to Schlatter's conception is clearly displayed.

<sup>98</sup> *Ethik*, 77.

<sup>99</sup> *Andachten*, 197. See also *Jesu Gottheit*, 99; *Kennen wir Jesus?*, 32.

<sup>100</sup> *Andachten*, 15.

our relation to God. For now we reveal the giver with what we have received, and we possess freedom of thought and will in order that we think and say God's thought and will and do God's will.<sup>101</sup>

It is only in the personal relationship of divine sonship that man becomes the one God intends him to be – namely a true human being. "Through communion with God," as Schlatter puts it, "we gain humanity."<sup>102</sup> Thus, with reference to the notion of *imago Dei* in Gen 1:27 Schlatter explicates "the [purposive] relatedness toward God as the specific difference of man, hence as what is properly human."<sup>103</sup>

## ii. Relationship with the rest of creation

Based on the personal relationship with God – the vertical relation – man is enabled to realise fully his interrelation and interaction with nature and fellow man – the horizontal relations.<sup>104</sup> In this context, Schlatter specifies his idea that the God-likeness of man consists in being created as a personal self, capable of free and self-determined action. As we have seen above, God exercises his creative power in such a way as to bring forth creaturely being and life. Through his creative relation to the creature he enables the same to be other than himself. According to Schlatter, man is the image of God when he relates and acts at the horizontal level in analogy with the relation and action that takes place between God and man at the vertical level.<sup>105</sup>

<sup>101</sup> *Metaphysik*, 59; cf. "Pforte zum Römerbrief," 61.

<sup>102</sup> *Dogma*, 506; cf. *ibid.*, 521-22; "Heilige Geschichte," 223.

<sup>103</sup> \**Genesis*, 42. See also Walldorf, *Realistische Philosophie*, 242. Colin Gunton puts this aspect of the *imago Dei* as follows: "To say that man is created in the image of God refers to the fact that God constitutes a particular being among all the other created beings to subsist in a particular and unique kind of relation with him. In that respect at least the image is indelible" (*idem*, *The Triune Creator*, 207).

<sup>104</sup> Space does not allow us to enter into the details of Schlatter's argument. For the fundamental character of man's relationship with God in Schlatter's ethics see Neuer, *Zusammenhang*, 150-53.

<sup>105</sup> Christoph Schwöbel states along similar lines: "This distinction of the human creation [the *imago Dei*], summarized in the concept of the human person, can be characterised as the ability to relate actively to the relatedness which constitutes human existence and which is grounded in God's creative action. This ascribes to human beings the ability to relate to God, to themselves in their social context, and to their cultural and natural environment" (*God: Action and Revelation*, 32).

## a) Nature (non-personal creation)

With regard to nature this means that man affirms his dependence upon nature and exercises his power to rule and use it in such a way as to preserve it and enable it to be itself. Schlatter uses different terms such as "cultivation" and "sanctification of nature"<sup>106</sup> in order to articulate this idea. Central to his considerations is the notion of free dominion over nature through service for, and submission to, it: "Through our acting upon nature we gain our dominion over it. However, the law unswervingly asserts itself here that we gain dominion over nature through our service which purely and simply obeys it [nature]. Any refractoriness [*Widersetzlichkeit*] over against the natural order [*Naturordnung*] avenges itself as impotence [*Ohnmacht*]."<sup>107</sup> Through this concept Schlatter wants to move beyond the fatal choice of either worship or the arbitrary subjugation and exploitation of nature.<sup>108</sup> Rather, personal relationship with the Creator enables man "to be at home" in nature: "Because we know God as the Creator of nature, we want to live in it and avoid anything that separates us from it. For the unnatural divides us from the divine work."<sup>109</sup> Schlatter links this kind of interaction between man and nature with the God-likeness of man:

There emerges a higher justice above a lower one – a more complete right above a less complete one according to the measure in which we, in our acting, preserve and make fruitful what nature has given to us. Thus, our right comes closer to the divine right, and God's image becomes visible in us, who makes nature the bearer of his grace for us.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> See *Ethik*, 253, 255. For the following see also Neuer's essay, "Naturtheologie als Basis einer ökologischen Ethik."

<sup>107</sup> *Dogma*, 161; similarly in *Philosophische Arbeit*, 105: "[W]e exercise our dominion over nature only in the strictest obedience to it."

<sup>108</sup> See e.g. *Dogma*, 44-49; *Briefe*, 29; *Ethik*, 83-84, 254; "Natur, Sünde und Gnade," 65.

<sup>109</sup> *Andachten*, 381; *Ethik*, 253 (in above order).

<sup>110</sup> *Ethik*, 67.

## b) Community (personal creation)

With regard to the interrelationship of human persons Schlatter argues that the *imago Dei* is realised when persons relate to and act upon each other in such a way as to free and enable one another to be and to act. This "liberating action" is "the attribute of love," the interaction in which "we in our activity found the activity of the other . . . in order that through it the other may become capable of himself [*seiner selbst mächtig werde*]." <sup>111</sup> Thus emerges, according to the "rule of love," the true community of love in which "one serves freely and rules liberatingly," "in which the individual works for the community and the community works for the individual." <sup>112</sup> The important point to see now is that, according to Schlatter, the *imago Dei* is realised when human persons relate to and act upon each other in analogy with God's creative and enabling action upon man. "As those who give freedom we are God's image." <sup>113</sup> In correlation to his understanding of God's action toward man, Schlatter holds that, when human persons act upon each other, "the image of the generator [*des Erzeugers*] comes about in the generated one [*im Erzeugten*] through the causal process." <sup>114</sup>

The lonely man who attempts to make himself the complete person out of himself in his isolation, does not become God's image but destroys the same and comes closer to the devil's image. Likewise, we do not become God's image in that we, in suffering dependence, are moved by the drives that grip us from outside; this way we make ourselves like nature. We become God's witness and image, however, by giving the strong, blessed and righteous life, which God granted to us, to others also. <sup>115</sup>

<sup>111</sup> \**Dogmatik I*, 10; cf. *ibid.*, 139-40; *Dogma*, 154-55.

<sup>112</sup> *Ethik*, 140. For the term "rule of love" in this context see *Gründe*, 60, 66.

<sup>113</sup> \**Dogmatik I*, 140.

<sup>114</sup> "Selbstdarstellungen," 163. For the analogy see the citation above, p. 35 n. 101.

<sup>115</sup> *Ethik*, 63.

## 2. God – the Preserver and Ruler of Humanity

### A. Preliminary remarks on the relation between creation and providence

The material presented thus far already entails many of the basic aspects which characterise Schlatter's concept of divine providence. In Schlatter, creation and providence are closely linked to each other. Before we start to present Schlatter's thought on divine providence in a coherent and systematic form it is important to see that his way of relating creation and redemption strives to obviate two extreme positions. The first one is an ontological actualism in which providence is seen as the continuation of the initial act of creation. This approach is in danger of depriving creation of its true subsistence and particular identity in otherness vis-à-vis the Creator. Furthermore, as we have seen Schlatter arguing, God's creative activity tends to be no longer conceivable as complete and successful.<sup>116</sup>

The second position to be obviated is an understanding of God's creative activity as an initial act after which God – in a deistic manner – leaves creation to itself. According to Schlatter, the goodness and perfection of *creatura* as the result of God's perfect *creatio* should not be used for denying further acts of God through which he continues to relate to the world.<sup>117</sup> Rather, the ontological dependence of the creature upon God continues to show itself in a variety of providential actions by which God sustains, enables and rules creation. In other words, God's initial mono-activity [*Alleinwirksamkeit*], through which he calls the world into being, founds a divine omni-activity [*Allwirksamkeit*] through which

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<sup>116</sup> See above, p. 21 n. 36. E. Brunner argues along similar lines in his discussion of the idea of *creatio continua*: "Certainly the danger of Pantheism lurks in the background. The danger-zone has already been entered when Creation and Preservation are identified with one another. For anyone who does not admit the distinction between the creation and the preservation of the created world does not take the fact of creation seriously. The relation of God to that which He has created is not the same as His relation to that which is yet to be created. That which has been created stands actually 'over against' God" (E. Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption*, 33-34).

<sup>117</sup> It is highly unlikely that this radical form of deism was positively propounded in the history of theology. As a theory it rather served as the negative background against which theologians developed their respective notions of divine providence. For this see R. Bernhardt, *Handeln Gottes*, 178-86.

God remains the one from whom and through whom and to whom everything is. What we call here "omni-activity" is defined by Schlatter as follows: "God's activity [*Wirken*] has extensive and intensive totality. It is extensively whole because it grips everybody, and it is intensively whole because it works [*wirkt*] everything. From his [God's] gift originates the whole life and acting [*Wirken*] of man because the latter has nothing which he has not received."<sup>118</sup> Hence, Schlatter understands divine providence to denote "the whole naturally existing relation of God to us."<sup>119</sup> It follows that Schlatter thinks of creation and providence as two distinct yet internally related activities. We shall further demonstrate this relational pattern in our exposition of his concept of God's *conservatio*.

### B. Divine providential action

Schlatter does not develop his notion of divine providence as a coherent doctrine. The statements on the basis of which we attempt to present Schlatter's understanding of this dogmatic locus appear throughout his writings in connection with his reflections on God's works as the product of divine action. An exception is a short passage in an unpublished lecture where Schlatter summarises the theological results of what he has outlined about man, nature and history. Here he briefly discusses the concepts of *conservatio*, *gubernatio* and *concursus*, for which reason we also adopt this structure for our exposition of Schlatter's approach.<sup>120</sup> This structure indicates an affinity of Schlatter's thought to the elaborate concepts of divine providence developed by the theologians of Lutheran orthodoxy – an af-

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<sup>118</sup> *Paulus der Bote*, 338. Similarly in "Wandel nach dem Geist," 25.

<sup>119</sup> \**Dogmatik I*, 199.

<sup>120</sup> See *ibid.*, 196-98.

finitude which, as will become clear in the following, regards not only the structural, but also the material, level.<sup>121</sup>

#### i. *Conservatio*

##### a) God's active and creative presence in creation

Schlatter's intention in his concept of *conservatio* is to explicate that the ontological dependence of creation upon God is not limited to the original act of creation. Rather, creaturely being and life is sustained and preserved through conservation as a divine activity in which God is actively and creatively present to creation. This applies, in the sense of *providentia generalis*, to the world as the whole of God's creation: "The world would not exist in its greatness, order and vivacity if God were not present in it."<sup>122</sup> Yet, God's preservation is particularly directed towards the human creature (*providentia specialis*). "We need an efficacious basis for our life." Schlatter views it as a great illusion to think

that the imperishable life-treasures, of which we are in need, lie in ourselves, that the source of light, which brings truth into our being, and the source of power, which flows towards eternal life, could be found in us. The basis on which we can stand, the inexhaustible foundation which sustains and nurtures spirits and lets them grow, exists for us in God, in the God whose Word we have before us which says: 'My son, everything I have is yours.'<sup>123</sup>

It is in this context that Schlatter explicates the divine *conservatio* not merely as a general divine efficacy but in terms of divine action. "If God denies us his gifts, nothing in us remains the way it used to be. We lose what we have. If God does not illuminate, we become dark for it is in his light that we see. If God does not enliven us, we die – for we live through him."<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Our observations are based on the outlines of Schmid, *Die Dogmatik der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*, 120-34; Ratschow, *Lutherische Dogmatik*, 208-47; Bernhardt, *Handeln Gottes*, especially 123-43.

<sup>122</sup> *Ruf Jesu*, 323; cf. the references above, p. 25 n. 52.

<sup>123</sup> "Gottes Söhne," 10-11.

<sup>124</sup> "Pforte zum Römerbrief," 61.



This accentuation of divine providence as *actio externa Dei* renders God's internal *praevisio* or *prognosis* secondary in Schlatter's approach. "Even conservation is a divine activity [*Aktivität*], not merely a permitting [*ein Zulassen*], a passive sustaining of the things, but the affirmation of the same in their subsistence [*Bestand*]. It [conservation] is therefore indeed conceivable as a constant forming [*stete Bildung*]."<sup>125</sup> Through this Schlatter takes up a central moment of Lutheran orthodoxy in which – beginning with Luther – the doctrinal emphasis concerning God's providence shifted from "*praescientia* and *determinatio*" to "*opus externum*."<sup>126</sup> However, Schlatter does not mean to reject the idea of "our being included in the divine teleology." For him there is no antithesis between God's providential thinking and acting: "God's providential thoughts [*fürsorgende Gedanken*] are the forming powers through which we are blessed."<sup>127</sup>

b) *Conservatio* and *creatio continua*

In order to obviate any misunderstanding of his expression "constant forming," Schlatter demarcates his concept again from a certain notion of *creatio continua*: "The formula 'constant creation' can lead to the idea that creation [as act] does not really succeed, as if it never brought about the existence of things. They [the things] sink constantly and repeatedly into nothingness and must be lifted out of nothing."<sup>128</sup> Schlatter, as we have suggested above, does not establish the link between the *creatio originalis* and the *conservatio* by means of a temporal concept of God's creative act. Rather, both are related through an operational analogy: in analogy to the original act of creating, God acts creatively *ex nihilo*

<sup>125</sup> \**Dogmatik I*, 196.

<sup>126</sup> See Ratschow, *Lutherische Dogmatik*, 211-13; Bernhardt, *Handeln Gottes*, 77-81, 125-26, 137-38; Schwöbel, "God, Creation and the Christian Community," 165-67.

<sup>127</sup> \**Dogmatik I*, 199. Schlatter briefly discusses God's *prognosis* in *Dogma*, 51, 123, 337.

<sup>128</sup> \**Dogmatik I*, 197.

when he – in his permanent presence to creation – sustains and upholds the same. In this sense one could attempt to capture Schlatter's thought in the phrase "*creatio continuata*."<sup>129</sup> Consequently, Schlatter's distinction between original creation and conservation does not rest upon the exclusive identification of *creatio ex nihilo* with *creatio originalis*.<sup>130</sup> Rather, what makes conservation distinguishable from original creation is that the latter constitutes the antecedent conditions of the former, as Schlatter words it, "constitutes the determining canon for the divine efficacy [*Wirken*]." Hence, Schlatter concludes as follows: "The idea of conservation expresses the fact that God's relation to that which becomes [*zum Werdenden*] is different from his relation to that which has become [*zum Gewordenen*]."<sup>131</sup> The terms "origination" (creation) and "interaction" (preservation) are suitable to mark the difference between the two relations.<sup>132</sup> We could summarise Schlatter's thought by saying that the original creation – because it depends on God for its being – presupposes conservation, and that conservation presupposes the original creation as that which is to be preserved.

Schlatter's thought entails the idea that God, in his preserving activity, is determined through the creature. However, as Schlatter underlines, the fact that the existing creation constitutes the determining canon for the divine efficacy "does not result in a dependence of God because it is precisely in the results of [God's own] creating that preservation has its

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<sup>129</sup> Schlatter's thoughts show an affinity to Luther's emphasis on the actuality of God's creative action *ex nihilo* in the here and now. Through this God brings about something new out of the already existing creation: "*Creare semper novum facere*" (see M. Beintker, "Das Schöpfercredo in Luthers Kleinem Katechismus," 5). Schwöbel and Bernhardt, in opposition to M. Beintker, speak of "*creatio continuata*" (Schwöbel, "God, Creation and the Christian Community," 165) and "*continuatio creationis*" (Bernhardt, *Handeln Gottes*, 79). A. Torrance argues that even the idea of continued creation does not safeguard the concept of divine creation against temporal connotations, that is, an act extended in time ("Creatio ex Nihilo," 98).

<sup>130</sup> See also A. Torrance's argumentation in "Creatio ex Nihilo," 97.

<sup>131</sup> \**Dogmatik I*, 197.

<sup>132</sup> Both terms are taken from Gunton, *The Triune Creator*, 179.

rule."<sup>133</sup> This suggests that the accommodation which occurs when God acts providentially, that is, interacts with the creature as other than himself, is the result of a divine self-determination to act in faithfulness to his own works and original purposes. Especially in relation to a fallen creation this faithfulness, as we shall elaborate in due course, reveals itself as the sole ground for the further existence of man and his world.

## ii. *Gubernatio*

### a) The teleological orientation of divine action

In his teaching on divine *conservatio* Schlatter explicates the fact that the creatures in general and man in particular are always dependent on God for their being and existence. Everything is from God. The second aspect of God's omni-activity – that everything is to God – is the primary concern of Schlatter's notion of divine *gubernatio*. God actively governs and steers the creaturely processes, events and actions in such a way as to reach his purposes through the creaturely causes. Through the idea of *gubernatio* God's providence is qualified as teleological action, the ultimate goal of which is a relationship in which man lives his life in personal response to God, thereby glorifying his Creator with the gifts he has received from him.

'To him' is what we are. This is the goal, the universal goal and at the same time the personal goal, the sense of world history and the sense of your history. What we have received was given to us in order that it may be offered to him. This means the sanctification of our whole life with all its natural and spiritual property [*Besitz*] and the unification [*Einigung*] of all who live for him.<sup>134</sup>

In our section on Schlatter's notion of *imago Dei* we elaborated that the realisation of human being as being-from-God and being-to-God not only has the purpose of glorifying the

<sup>133</sup> \**Dogmatik I*, 197.

<sup>134</sup> "Ziel der Geschichte," 354. The unity of will is a central aspect of the personal relationship of God and man. Thus Schlatter can say (ibid., 351): "The question about the goal of history means: when have I made my will one with God's will?" See further *Erläuterungen I*, 978.

Creator. Rather, human existence itself reaches its completion here – indeed, the well-being of the whole of creation is fully realised when man lives from and to God.<sup>135</sup>

b) God's ruling of man through nature and history

Schlatter applies the notion of divine *gubernatio* especially to the interaction between God and man.<sup>136</sup> The idea that God is the Creator and ruler of nature and history leads, as we have seen above, to the idea that God creates, enables and rules man through nature and history. "The creative power [*Schöpfermacht*] of God includes that he is the Lord of his works and rules heaven and earth."<sup>137</sup> God "is the Creator and Lord of all things, who rules us through the fact that he has prepared nature and history for us, in whose [God's] work we always live so that there does not exist anything senseless or indifferent for us."<sup>138</sup> This is to say that God rules nature and history in such a way that they serve his good purposes with humanity. In that God orders and steers the natural and historical course of events he provides the conditional net in which man is able to be and act in accordance with God's purposes for creation.

Schlatter elaborates that the "royal working [*Walten*] of God" is not "without relation to nature, in and through which we live; rather it [the royal working] provides for us nature through which we experience his goodness, and in its completion effects nature's renewal and transfiguration."<sup>139</sup> Hence, Schlatter defines the notion of divine providence as "faith granted to us through the purposive ordering of nature," as the belief "that the efficacious-

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<sup>135</sup> Note the correlation with Lutheran orthodoxy and its articulation of the *causa finis* of God's providential action as *gloria creatoris*, *bonum universi*, and *salus piorum* (see e.g. Ratschow, *Lutherische Dogmatik*, 222).

<sup>136</sup> See *Dogma*, 37 (quoted above, p. 33 n. 94); \**Dogmatik I*, 197.

<sup>137</sup> *Erläuterungen I*, 977.

<sup>138</sup> *Ethik*, 296.

<sup>139</sup> *Dogma*, 88.

ness of nature upon us is regulated in such a way as to be wholesome for us."<sup>140</sup> In this connection, purpose is the most crucial of the four "intelligible powers" through which God rules nature. The teleology of nature reaches its completion in God's purposive and beneficial regulating and ordering of the natural processes towards the human person.<sup>141</sup> For Schlatter, nature is a witness who shows "that the power on which we are dependent is gracious and cares for us. We call the one who helps us with almighty goodness, our God."<sup>142</sup> Schlatter refers to this idea as the "faithful realism [*gläubiger Realismus*]" of the Bible, "which perceives in every natural event the divine efficaciousness that creates us."<sup>143</sup> Nature is the medium through which God actively determines human being and rules human life. "God is there and reigns, and this in such a way that nature is neither strange nor difficult nor a hindrance for him. Rather, it lies softly and flexibly in his hands. For it is his creature."<sup>144</sup> To believe in the creator "does not mean that we desire a new heaven and a new earth but rather that we honour *this* heaven and *this* earth as the carriers of the divine efficacy."<sup>145</sup> Therefore, simply by virtue of his existence in and dependence upon nature, man is subject to the divine power and will. "[O]ur existence – including everything it comprises – subsists by God's power. . . . The creature stands in dependence upon God even if it does not know him. . . . The creature must do the will of God even if it neither knows nor wills it."<sup>146</sup> However, God's purpose with man is a personal relationship in

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>141</sup> See *ibid.*, 53-58. For an illuminating outline of Schlatter's understanding of the teleology of nature see Neuer, *Zusammenhang*, 127-29; Walldorf, *Realistische Philosophie*, 207-09.

<sup>142</sup> *Andachten*, 296.

<sup>143</sup> "Natur, Sünde und Gnade," 50. Schlatter underlines that the affirmation of nature as the medium of God's providence is not dependent upon a *complete* understanding of nature's teleology (see *Dogma*, 55; *Philosophische Arbeit*, 135).

<sup>144</sup> *Ruf Jesu*, 77; see also "Wunder," 831.

<sup>145</sup> "Grenzen der kirchlichen Gemeinschaft," 8.

<sup>146</sup> *Andachten*, 197.

which man realises his creaturely capacities and lives his life in volitional accordance with God's will. Even in this connection, as Schlatter expounds, nature serves God's good purpose with man in that it mediates and reveals the divine will. "Nature stands before us in the dignity of the divine work as the medium through which God makes and governs us so that with the understanding of the natural events our insight into the divine will, which we have to obey, grows."<sup>147</sup>

In a similar way Schlatter outlines the divine *gubernatio* of history. Although history is the place where man – in relation to his fellow-creatures and his Creator – actuates his capacity for free and self-determined action, "[t]he divine decree penetrates . . . everything that happens."<sup>148</sup> In other words, God's "reign comprises everything, even that which we bring forth in our own power, in the free usage [*Freiheitsgebrauch*] of sovereign decisions of will."<sup>149</sup> We have seen that Schlatter interprets the teleological ordering of history primarily as the benevolent orientation of God's action towards man.<sup>150</sup> Man is placed in community and history, which is to say "that he [God] wills to have us in the way our historical place makes us, as part of this whole which extends through time and knits us together with the . . . curse and blessing of the past."<sup>151</sup> Schlatter is convinced that history provides man with God's guidance and that God shows his will through history.<sup>152</sup> On this

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<sup>147</sup> *Ethik*, 253. With this we have touched the complex issue of the significance of natural law (*Naturrecht*) for ethics. A deeper examination of this topic goes beyond our purposes here. We refer to Neuer's exhaustive exposition of Schlatter's concept of natural law and orders of creation (*Schöpfungsordnungen*) in *Zusammenhang*, 49-55, 168-71, 271-75, 279-97; see also idem, "Schöpfung und Gesetz."

<sup>148</sup> "Wunder," 831.

<sup>149</sup> "Wort und Schrift," 25; similarly in *Metaphysik*, 87.

<sup>150</sup> See above, p. 31.

<sup>151</sup> *Dogma*, 85. As we have seen to be the case with nature, Schlatter underlines that the affirmation of history as the medium of God's providential action is not dependent on a complete understanding of the rationality and teleology of history (see *ibid.*; *Philosophische Arbeit*, 135).

<sup>152</sup> See e.g. *Ethik*, 44, 256. Again, we sense at this point that history, like nature, plays an important role in Schlatter's notion of the foundation and the material of Christian ethics. Space does not allow us to go into more details. See Neuer's treatment of the subject in *Zusammenhang*, 165-71.

basis history is a divine medium through which man is summoned and enabled to live his life in personal response to God. "Because there is history through which God blesses [*begnadet*] us and acts for us, we are also called to act. The God who acts for us is also the one who acts through us."<sup>153</sup> This transition from the God who acts for us to the God who acts through us and thus realises his purposes, is well articulated in the following sentences:

The individual is altogether the one who receives, for all things are from God. At the beginning of all events there is his will and his power, and through him are all things; there is no one who moves who is not prompted by him, no one who knows and obeys who is not enlightened by him, no one who acts who does not act as his instrument. As all being is from him and all events transpire through him, so everything also has its goal in him. Everything is brought to him, to his knowledge, to submission under his verdict, to the unification with his will, to the revelation of his glory. Therefore he is the one to whom all honor belongs; apart from him no one has it. He is the one who is praised without end!<sup>154</sup>

Along these lines Schlatter defines the notion of *gubernatio* in the sense that human persons "are, in their freedom, set and valued by God as the workers of their own history. Their history is related to God's goal. They receive the dignity to be doers of the divine will."<sup>155</sup> With these thoughts we have reached the transitional point from *providentia generalis* (the whole world in general) and *specialis* (the human creature) to *providentia specialissima*. This is to say that, according to Schlatter, God's providential action comes to completion in a very special way in and through those persons whom God has united in a community of faith. We shall briefly explore this in the final section of our outline of Schlatter's notion of *concursus Dei*.

#### c) The differentiation between mediate and immediate providential acts of God

When we recapitulate the material just outlined we observe that, according to Schlatter, God's providence takes place in continuous accordance with the orderly events and

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<sup>153</sup> *Dogma*, 516; cf. e.g. above, p. 31 n. 85.

<sup>154</sup> *Romans*, 226; similarly in *Erläuterungen I*, 978.

<sup>155</sup> \**Dogmatik I*, 197.

processes of nature and history. Divine *conservatio* and *gubernatio* are conceived as mediate action. With regard to the "course of the world" Schlatter argues "that the forces which are effective here, are given to the things themselves as their continuous and remaining property. Hence, in this sphere, the efficacy of God presents itself as something mediated. It conceals itself behind the measure and law given to nature."<sup>156</sup> Yet, like the theologians of Lutheran orthodoxy, Schlatter distinguishes, albeit implicitly, between *providentia ordinaria* or *mediata* and *providentia extraordinaria* or *immediata*.<sup>157</sup> In other words, the course of nature and history not only consists of events and processes which mediate God's providence but also of immediate acts through which God, in the sovereignty and transcendence of his will, rules man and his world according to the divine intentions and purposes. This immediate activity is the locus where Schlatter's idea of divine providence as creative acting in creation is most clearly explicated.

Throughout his work, Schlatter combines his notion of God's creative act with the concept of miracle: "[C]reation is a miracle."<sup>158</sup> The creative sovereignty of the God in, through, and to whom everything exists, is a constitutive factor of every miracle. It "is invested with the seal of omnipotence [*Allmacht*] and comes to light as a creative act. Therefore, the word is the only perceivable medium through which it is brought about."<sup>159</sup> God's otherness and superiority are clearly marked: "There is only one worker [*Wirker*] of miracles, namely God; for there is only one who is able to act creatively."<sup>160</sup> Miracles are "creative acts which happen in nature, but not through nature." Schlatter's intention in all this is to underline that God's activity must not be reduced to natural and historical processes and

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<sup>156</sup> "Wunder," 831; similarly in \**Dogma und Geschichte*, 9.

<sup>157</sup> For this differentiation see Bernhardt, *Handeln Gottes*, 136-37; Ratschow, *Lutherische Dogmatik*, 219.

<sup>158</sup> "Wunder der Bibel," 72; similarly *ibid.*, 75, 79. See also the references above, p. 20 n. 30.

<sup>159</sup> "Wunder," 832.

<sup>160</sup> *Dogma*, 59.



laws. The miracles "show us God's superiority over nature in his creative power." In this context, Schlatter gives what may be called a definition of a creative act:

An activity [*Wirken*] proves to be creative when it possesses totality, that means when it unites willing and acting, word and power. It is therefore superior to space and time and to the obstructions which both bring upon acting. Therefore, the miracle does not endanger the idea of causality but affirms it. For in a miracle we do not think of an effect without worker [*Wirker*] but explicitly apply the idea of causality here because in the miracle we know God as the one who effects the same.<sup>161</sup>

The question to be asked here is the following: is God's immediate activity not the violation, even the destruction of the creation in which it happens? Is it not an inconceivable breach of the natural and historical laws established by God himself so that we are confronted with an either/or decision?

Schlatter's answer to these objections is negative. Because God, and not a creature, is the acting subject, it is not required of the creature to act in contradiction to itself.<sup>162</sup> Schlatter argues that God, even when he performs a miracle, acts in a manner appropriate to the being and existence of creation. In the case of nature this means:

"Because God is the causing one in the miracle, the unshakeable preservation of nature is an essential part of the event. This is constantly made visible in that its result is directly integrated in the natural nexus [*Naturzusammenhang*] and subjected to the law which establishes the connection of all events to the one world."<sup>163</sup>

As Schlatter puts it elsewhere: "For in the Bible there is only one doer of miracles because there is only one creator, and this one is God." Therefore, one must not fear that God's miracle brings nature into disorder. "He, who works the miracle, also created and preserves nature. It lies inviolably well-protected and secure in his hand, especially when he – in the glory of his almighty grace – gives what nature can not (and is not supposed to) give us."<sup>164</sup> Schlatter goes even a step further when he elaborates that through a miracle God enables and empowers creaturely being and life. A miracle effects "the strongest, most complete

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 58; cf. "Wunder der Bibel," 72.

<sup>162</sup> See "Wunder," 832.

<sup>163</sup> *Dogma*, 58-59; similarly in *Ethik*, 53.

<sup>164</sup> "Wunder der Bibel," 79.

sanctification of nature."<sup>165</sup> Schlatter illustrates the meaning of this statement through the miracles of Jesus, arguing that there is no "stronger affirmation of the life . . . which was lived in Bethany than the one which happened when the power of the creator became effective in order that Lazarus might continue to live a couple of more years in his village." Schlatter summarises: "That God's will may be done and his work may receive completion was the goal of Jesus when he denied the miracle and submitted himself in life and death to the law of nature as well as when he did the miracle."<sup>166</sup>

The aforementioned aspects indicate that Schlatter regards God's immediate and particular activity as intentional action through which he creatively moves creation, especially the human creature, towards the goals which also determine his mediate providential activity. The decisive moment here is that Schlatter understands the divine efficacy not merely in terms of an omnipotent natural causality but in terms of personal – hence, intentional action. Thus, a "harmonious homogeneity between the miracles and the rest of the course of history" emerges. Indeed, the former become parts of the latter and thus gain intelligibility and rationality.<sup>167</sup> Schlatter brings this argument to a point when he reflects on the history of Israel:

The sacred miracle, which comes from above, has its seal in the fact that the power is here subordinate to truth, righteousness and grace. The miracles of the exodus from Egypt become the ground of Israel's history not merely because they reveal omnipotence, but rather because it is the *omnipotence of a Father* who calls his sons to himself, redeems and preserves them in order that they stand in his community and service (emphasis A. L.).<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> *Sprechstunde*, 24. The term "sanctification of nature" occurred above, p. 36.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>167</sup> "Wunder," 832.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 832. It is worth noting the affinity to the concept which Kirkpatrick develops in his essay "Understanding an Act of God." He argues that a distinction between event and act provides us with the conceptual equipment to understand the immediate and particular acts of God as interventions "in the otherwise natural flow of events." He concludes that God's particular acts are as little a violation of natural and historical laws as the acts of a human agent (177-78).

### iii. *Concursus*

The fact that God's providential action is mediated through the impersonal as well as the personal creation raises the question of the enabling and empowering of the creatures to be mediators of God's actions. This is, according to Schlatter, the point of the notion of divine *concursus* or *cooperatio*. "The concursus-formula" was developed in order to express "the way in which God's assistance in the things and persons takes place."<sup>169</sup> In Schlatter the doctrine of divine *concursus* addresses the modal question that underlies the concepts of *conservatio* and *gubernatio*: how is the divine efficacy related to creaturely efficacy? Schlatter operates implicitly with three distinctions according to which we structure our presentation of the material.<sup>170</sup>

#### a) *Concursus generalis*

Schlatter expounds that every creature – in order to act – depends upon the empowering and enabling activity of God. "Not only is the being of every thing preserved in general, but also the concrete effect which it [the thing] exercises in the given moment is made possible through the cooperation of God."<sup>171</sup> With this the *concursus divinus* is specified as a creative activity of God which constitutes the necessary condition for any causal activity of the creature. As we have seen to be the case with the creation of the world and man, Schlatter has an ontological understanding of God's efficacy as the enabling-ground of all creaturely efficacy. This is the basis for Schlatter's idea of God's omni-causality in the divine preservation and government of the world. Every event and act happens through God. Walldorf has outlined that Schlatter implicitly works with the Thomist conception of *causa*

<sup>169</sup> \**Dogmatik I*, 198.

<sup>170</sup> The terms *providentia generalis*, *specialis*, *specialissima* occur as marginal note *ibid.*, 199.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 198. For the same accentuation see Härle, *Dogmatik*, 291.

*prima (principalis)* and *causa secunda (instrumentalis)* when he regards the metaphysical categories – of which causality is one – as being caused.<sup>172</sup> Illuminating in this context is E. Wölfel's summary: "The whole world, including the causality immanent in it, is conceived as being embraced by a causality which only now gives it the capacity to act causally itself."<sup>173</sup>

Schlatter illustrates the cooperation of divine and creaturely efficacy with regard to the idea of evolution in nature: "In that we know the Last, who is the First, we also know why there is development [*Entwicklung*], namely because nature is not devoid of the cooperation of the one who causes it and whom it, after it has been caused, serves as the medium for his efficacy."<sup>174</sup> Schlatter emphasises that there is an actual relation between the divine and the creaturely cause. They must not be understood as two activities running parallel to each other. However, the "working with and in each other of God and creature [*das Mit- und Ineinanderwirken Gottes und der Kreatur*]" remains a mystery to Schlatter.<sup>175</sup>

#### b) *Concursus specialis*

In Schlatter's view, the concept of divine *concursus* unfolds its full meaning when it is applied to the relation between God and man. The latter is in all his actions as personal agent dependent upon the cooperation of God: "[T]here is no one who moves who is not prompted by him, no one who knows and obeys who is not enlightened by him, no one who acts who does not act as his instrument."<sup>176</sup> A case in point is the procreation of man.

<sup>172</sup> See Walldorf, *Realistische Philosophie*, 169-81, especially 177-81.

<sup>173</sup> Wölfel, *Welt als Schöpfung*, 33, also quoted in Walldorf, *Realistische Philosophie*, 179-80.

<sup>174</sup> *Dogma*, 47; similarly in *Gründe*, 56.

<sup>175</sup> See \**Wesen und Quellen*, 81-82 where Schlatter is rather sceptical about the term *concursus* since it suggests two parallel activities.

<sup>176</sup> *Romans*, 226.

Schlatter expounds that the "ability to make human persons" should not be conceived of as a human possibility. "Already the doubleness of function which father and mother have in it [procreation] compels us to affirm a power that stands above both, destines both for each other, and makes them capable of cooperation." The same applies to the construction of an evolutionary chain in which a causal connection is established that – via the ancestors and the different types of animals – reaches back to the first cell. "[W]e . . . need a power that stands above the single factors which participate in our becoming and procures for them the capability for cooperation."<sup>177</sup> Schlatter grounds this cooperation of human agents and creaturely causes explicitly in the cooperation of God.<sup>178</sup> "Nobody must forget that prior to everything he does [*vor allem, was er macht*] stands the moment in which he was made [*der Moment, in dem er gemacht wurde*] as the one who only receives."<sup>179</sup>

Schlatter is aware that such an understanding of the relation between divine and human efficacy must by all means be secured against locating both on the same level. We have mentioned that Schlatter, in implicit adoption of the *causa prima-causa secunda* scheme, clearly distinguishes between God's causality and the world-immanent causality. Schlatter knows of a founding relation (*Begründungsrelation*) which is not a symmetrical one but moves exclusively from God to the creature. This distinction is even more crucial for the notion of the *concursus* of God and man. To locate God and man on the same actional level bears the danger of a causal theo-monism in which the action of man is divested of its human authenticity. This amounts ultimately to an inner-theological problem because God is conceived of as acting in contradiction to his original purpose in which he created man as personal agent and invested him with causal power even in relation to God-

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<sup>177</sup> *Dogma*, 26.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 61-62.

<sup>179</sup> *Erlebtes*, 121.

self. Schlatter argues that such a collapse of the human into the divine, and vice versa, can be avoided when God's *cooperatio* is consistently interpreted as truly creative action, as "assistance by God – not only logical but real and effective [assistance] –" "cooperation" in which "the operation of the 'I' is founded, not destroyed."<sup>180</sup>

Whether or not Schlatter is able to relate divine and human being and action in the way suggested can only be evaluated after we have outlined further details of his concept of divine agency. Yet this can already be said: the idea of *concursus Dei* constitutes a nodal point at which Schlatter's theology of divine agency continuously comes to a head.

### c) *Concursus specialissima*

In Schlatter, divine providential action comes to completion in that God creatively institutes and enables a personal relationship of faith and love between man and himself. We must not repeat what has already been said about God's purpose with creation in general and man in particular. Our concern is this: when God brings forth a community of sons and daughters he is truly Father and truly King. We are dealing here, as Schlatter argues, with a divine *conservatio* and *gubernatio* which formally and materially constitute the highest level of divine providential action.<sup>181</sup> Schlatter develops these thoughts on the basis of a model of divine interaction which we call here *concursus specialissima*. "[T]he royal working [*Walten*] of God forms our inner life and thus, in that it grips the many in their

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<sup>180</sup> \**Dogmatik I*, 198. The struggle of Lutheran orthodoxy for an adequate way of relating divine and human action is notable in statements such as that of J. A. Quenstedt: "God not only gives second causes the power to act, and preserves this, but immediately influences the action and effect of the creature, so that the same effect is produced not by God alone, nor by the creature alone, nor partly by God and partly by the creature, but *at the same time by God and the creature*, as one and the same total efficiency, viz., by God as by the universal and first cause, and by the creature as the particular and second cause" (*Theologia didactico-polemica*, 3d ed. Wittenberg 1669, I, 531; quoted in O. C. Thomas, "Introduction *God's Activity in the World*," 3).

<sup>181</sup> This is the line of thought in Schlatter's section "*Gottes Vaterschaft und Königtum*" in *Dogma*, 87-89.

personal life and unites them with God, his kingdom comes about.<sup>182</sup> Elsewhere we have seen Schlatter articulating this as "the sanctification of our whole life with all its natural and spiritual property [*Besitz*] and the unification [*Einigung*] of all who live for him."<sup>183</sup> Through this divine *concursus* man as personal agent is empowered and enabled to act in accordance with God in such a way that God works through the works of man. "If man is God's work then the human will originates from God's will and God's work happens in the human activity."<sup>184</sup> Schlatter articulates the *specialissima* moment of this as follows: "[T]he one who has become obedient to God by faith and for whom Christ has become his Lord, produces works in a new dimension; and, compared with the natural condition, he does so to an incomparably greater degree because he now shares in the divine activity."<sup>185</sup> In this way, Schlatter concludes, God works a history in which he reveals himself.

With the notion of kingdom [*Reichsgedanken*] we make the concept of providence complete because through the former we relate God's goodness not merely to our destiny [*Geschick*] but describe the complete and personal communion [*Verbundenheit*] with God which makes our inner life the work of God and our history, the place of his revelation.<sup>186</sup>

For Schlatter prayer is the culminating point of this relation between divine and human action. Indeed, prayer is the necessary condition in which human action and history become the place of God's activity and revelation.

We are called to volitional service for God in which we are allowed to enter without reservation and with our complete personhood. Through this we are made carriers of a history. . . . We must not accomplish this particular life-history of ours in isolation from God – but in him and through him and toward him. Therefore, it is of great importance that we encompass our own history with our supplication and faith so that our action grows out of God's action and our service is grounded in God's gift.<sup>187</sup>

It would be an interesting task to use Schlatter's teaching on prayer as a test case for his concept of divine providence. However, the limits of this study allow us merely to expli-

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<sup>182</sup> *Dogma*, 87.

<sup>183</sup> See above, p. 43.

<sup>184</sup> *Rückblick*, 11.

<sup>185</sup> *Romans*, 51.

<sup>186</sup> See *Dogma*, 88; "Ziel der Geschichte," 354.

<sup>187</sup> "Heilige Geschichte," 218-19.

cate those features which relate directly to the notion of *concursum specialissima*. Suffice it to say, Schlatter understands prayer to be "the most direct expression" of man's faith in, and love for, God.<sup>188</sup> Faith and love are the two postures in which man seeks God as the acting and giving one from whom man receives everything he is and does. To put it in terms of our subject: prayer is the place where the divine will is received in such a way that man unites his own will with it and hence acts in accordance with God and his purposes. Schlatter regards petitionary prayer to be crucial in this connection.

Therefore, prayer is the climax of our life. The great thing in it is that in supplication a will is born in us which aims at God's will, touches him, and offers itself to him as the basis on which God can ground his work [*Wirken*] in us. Here the exchange of life between spirit and spirit stands on its highest level.<sup>189</sup>

This "exchange" does not happen at the expense of human personhood. Rather, as Schlatter is keen to underline, through his supplication man grounds his will in God's will.

Faith is God's gift; so too is that prayer that proceeds from faith. Precisely through believing prayer we overcome the arrogance that would gladly place itself above God. And humility becomes a possibility, for we receive with thanks all good things from his hand, as we derive with supplication our actions from his will. As faith brings about deliverance from the self, prayer brings about repudiation of our selfish will – not so that we will become will-less, but so that our will might be founded on God's rule and reign.<sup>190</sup>

The immediate connection of the aforementioned thoughts with Schlatter's notion of *concursum specialissima* is most obvious when he elaborates that "believing prayer" results in a cooperation [*Mitwirkung*] between God and man:

In conferring legitimacy on our wishes through supplication, what we request can be carried out and fulfilled. We have God as an accomplice [*Mitwirker*] in what we do, once we have prepared ourselves through prayer to be God's accomplice. He who must act faces the choice of either praying or offending God, and he chooses the latter by determining his conduct autonomously. Such conduct amounts to a negation of God. Supplication is imperative for doing one's work as God's servant; every legitimate action must be a fruit of prayer.<sup>191</sup>

<sup>188</sup> See *Dogma*, 204. Schlatter's section on prayer (*Dogma*, 203-12) is quoted according to Yarbrough's translation "Prayer."

<sup>189</sup> *Gründe*, 88.

<sup>190</sup> *Dogma*, 206. See also *Gründe*, 88-93.

<sup>191</sup> *Dogma*, 206.



### C. Human sinfulness and divine providence

So far we have left Schlatter's concept of human sinfulness more or less aside. This is no longer possible for a couple of reasons. Schlatter takes seriously the idea that God creates and enables man as a personal self capable of free and self-determined action. This includes the possibility of human existence in antithesis to the divine purposes with humanity. As will become clear in due course, Schlatter is convinced that man has opted for this possibility so that the creature is no longer neutral but under sin. If, as Schlatter puts it, that which God has created "constitutes the determining canon" for God's providential action, then the reality of human sinfulness must have repercussions on Schlatter's understanding of God's action toward and relation to man. Thus, we shall now introduce some basic aspects of Schlatter's doctrine of sin and after that return to his concept of God's providence, paying special attention to Schlatter's attempt to integrate the actuality of sin and the omnivivacity of God in the *conservatio* and *gubernatio* of the human creature.<sup>192</sup>

#### i. Original sin (*peccatum originale*) and the concrete act of sin (*peccatum actuale*)

Schlatter defines original sin in the traditional sense as inherited sin (*peccatum haereditarium*): "Because our communal life is brought about through procreation and inheritance, the abnormality [*Abnormität*] which we have in common is inherited."<sup>193</sup> As such, original sin determines the single sinful act: "Even the most free acting-out-of-sin is the act of the one who, already before his own decision, carried the condemnable within him-

<sup>192</sup> Although Schlatter's concept of sin is one of the most heavily-discussed subjects of his theology, we must restrain ourselves and focus on those aspects which serve our purposes here. The most comprehensive studies of Schlatter's hamartiology can be found in Neuer, *Zusammenhang*, 172-95 and Rieger, *Rechtfertigungslehre*, 73-78, 118-32, 175-209, 284-306.

<sup>193</sup> *Dogma*, 254.

self."<sup>194</sup> Parallel to the unity of human being and work, original sin and the concrete act of sin are indissolubly connected with each other. Referring to Mt 7:15-20 Schlatter states: "From thorn bushes and thistles one does not pick grapes and figs; bad fruit: *ergo* bad tree."<sup>195</sup> Hence, in the same way as the concrete act, original sin stands under "the categorical protest through which we reject that which ought not be (*das Nichtseinsollende*)."<sup>196</sup>

ii. Sin and its total impact on man (*peccatum totale*)

Sin impacts human life in its totality, that is, there is no sphere which is not under the influence of sin.<sup>197</sup> Schlatter develops this idea on the basis of the mutuality of productivity and receptivity, power and dependence. As we have outlined above, in relation to nature and fellow man, man is ruler and servant at the same time. Yet sin collapses the balance between rule and service: "He [sinful will] wants to rule without serving; to serve without ruling; not serve God but serve his body, not serve people when he is called to serve, but instead serving when he is called to freedom."<sup>198</sup> The consequence is the abnormality of the different relations in which man is placed. At the heart of this is the disintegration of man's relationship with God.

Schlatter sees man's relation to God as the "primordial seat of evil."<sup>199</sup> The distortions in all the other relationships are "only the reflex of the broken basic relation [*des gebrochenen Grundverhältnisses*] to God."<sup>200</sup> Schlatter describes sin as man's unwillingness to

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 254.

<sup>195</sup> \**Lehre von der Sünde*, 7.

<sup>196</sup> *Dogma*, 254. Cf. \**Lehre von der Sünde*, 7-8; "Sollen wir gegen unsere Sünde kämpfen," 84-88.

<sup>197</sup> See *Dogma*, 21. In "Sollen wir gegen unsere Sünde kämpfen," 84 Schlatter rejects any attempt to distinguish between sinful and healthy areas of human being and acting.

<sup>198</sup> *Dogma*, 165.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 164-65, 223-24.

<sup>200</sup> \**Lehre von der Sünde*, 11.

allow anybody above himself, the refusal to receive his being and life. Sin is rebellion against the orders, duties and laws which God has given to man by ontologically relating the human person to nature, fellow man and Creator. Instead, man wants to be Creator himself, wants to rule without obeying, and thus "the 'I' loses the 'thou' – the divine 'Thou' that stands above him, and the human 'thou' that is beside him."<sup>201</sup> Such a reversal of the Creator-creature relationship is, as Schlatter shows, directly observable in the religions: man creates God in his image.<sup>202</sup> As such, sin is *peccatum contra Deum*, "the assassination of God which denies his fatherly and royal right on us."<sup>203</sup> Consequently, the true relationship to God, the actualisation of human God-relatedness, is made impossible. Sin means separateness from God.

In a similar way, sin impacts man's relation to himself, nature and neighbour. Schlatter operates with the biblical terms of "flesh" and "world" to express the universal impact of evil.<sup>204</sup> "Flesh" means that the bodily instincts and cravings overwhelm man as corporeal being and turn him into a "permanent bubbling stream of desires."<sup>205</sup> Schlatter, in this context, speaks of the "omnipotence" and the "tyranny" of the flesh.<sup>206</sup> Gratifying the selfish desires of the flesh, man lives as *homo incurvatus in se*, always bent back upon himself.<sup>207</sup> Man perverts his corporeality into a means to its own ends. Similarly, man in his egoism carries sin into the community – but is also inevitably led to sin because of his ontological

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<sup>201</sup> "Natur, Sünde und Gnade," 56.

<sup>202</sup> See "Kreuz Jesu," 7-14 where Schlatter provides a thorough examination of how man puts God in the service of his egoism and self-centredness when he creates his own idols. Cf. *Dogma*, 200-03, 220-22, 252; *\*Wesen und Quellen*, 132; *Briefe*, 36 ("egoistic religiosity"); "Natur, Sünde und Gnade," 59 ("Therefore, the religion brought forth by nature is sinful."); "Gott der Patriarchen," 91 ("A religion constructed by us is godlessness."). According to Schlatter, the inversion of the ruler-servant relation in man is made complete in his self-abasement under the created idols. See *Romans*, 40-41.

<sup>203</sup> *\*Lehre von der Sünde*, 11.

<sup>204</sup> See e.g. *Dogma*, 251-53; "Natur, Sünde und Gnade," 58; *Gründe*, 54.

<sup>205</sup> "Natur, Sünde und Gnade," 58.

<sup>206</sup> See *Dogma*, 252.

<sup>207</sup> See *Romans*, 155.

relation to the other. For Schlatter, this inevitability explains what the term "world" means. "We cannot transcend the common human type but remain that to which the community makes us, even in the most powerful strain of our will."<sup>208</sup> What follows is that man's relation to nature and neighbour is one of evil exploitation and sinful subordination. Thus, man's being, acting, and the circumstances under which he lives are pervaded by sin.

### iii. Sin and the sovereignty and faithfulness of God

Notwithstanding the total impact of sin upon man, in Schlatter the *peccatum totale* does not mean that "everything in us and every action of ours [is] sin."<sup>209</sup> In his unpublished commentary on the Bethel Confession of 1933, he goes so far as to "reject the *heresy* that every thought and every act of man is sin" (emphasis A. L.).<sup>210</sup> Rather, with respect to both human being and action, Schlatter argues for a "mixed condition" of man in which evil and good are together.<sup>211</sup> Schlatter presents different arguments in support of his view.

#### a) The exegetical argument

He repeatedly points to the New Testament, especially to Jesus and Paul, as the exegetical foundation of his understanding: "Jesus did not see only evil in man but also good,

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<sup>208</sup> *Dogma*, 253.

<sup>209</sup> *Dogma*, 224.

<sup>210</sup> \**Commentary on the Bethel Confession*, IV, p. 11 second correction.

<sup>211</sup> See *Dogma*, 227, 263-65. Neuer brings to the surface that Schlatter's view on the subject gradually developed. In his earlier essays \**Lehre von der Sünde* and "Sollen wir gegen unsere Sünde kämpfen" (1888) Schlatter still outlines that man in his entire being and in all his actions is evil. In his later writings Schlatter changes his view. See Neuer, *Zusammenhang*, 179-80. Rieger's distinction between the relation of judgement (*Urteilsrelation*) and the relation of origin (*Entstehungsrelation*) is indeed helpful here. With regard to the origin of sin (*Entstehungsrelation*) Schlatter argues for a mutual relation between the sinful act and the sinful being of man. Yet, with regard to the passing of a judgement on sin (*Urteilsrelation*) Schlatter induces the *totus peccator* from the sinful act but does not allow for deducing the sinfulness of every act from the *totus peccator*. See Rieger, *Rechtfertigungslehre*, 202.

and Paul tells us that we are able to accomplish works of the law."<sup>212</sup> This is in accordance with the observation of estimable "values," "various nuances of piety," and "morality" in people outside the Christian faith.<sup>213</sup> Fully agreeing with the intention of Augustinianism to remove any excuse for evil, Schlatter articulates the difference between Augustinianism and the New Testament as follows: "Augustinianism denies that any good can be found in man. Paul denies that our good excuses our evil so that we can justify ourselves through the fact that what we have done is not exclusively evil."<sup>214</sup>

#### b) The dogmatic argument

Still weightier than his exegetical argument, however, is Schlatter's dogmatic argument. The theological foundation for the notion of a "mixed condition" of man lies in God himself, namely in the sovereignty and faithfulness of the Creator toward his creature: "The possibility that we again and again find in ourselves the good together with our condemnable actions and conditions, originates from the fact that in our sinful behaviour we do not cease to be God's work and to live in his presence."<sup>215</sup> God, in his otherness and sovereignty, remains faithful to that which he has created. Even in the face of human sin, God actively sustains, rules and enables the human creature to be and to act. The sinner cannot "remove the two facts which gave him existence: first, that he was a creature of God; sec-

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<sup>212</sup> *Dogma*, 226. Cf. *ibid.*, 195-96, 578, 595-96; *History of the Christ*, 247; *Theology of the Apostles*, 207; "Idealismus oder Theologie," 363-65; *\*Lehre von der Sünde*, 8-9; "Moral oder Evangelium," 93-94, 106-07. Some of the passages to which Schlatter calls attention are: Mt 5:8; 7:11, 18; 19:17-19; 25:31-46; Lk 10:25-37; 16:1-9; 18:1-6; Ro 2:14.

<sup>213</sup> *Ethik*, 204-05, 244-45. Schlatter's idea of a mixed condition finds its fullest expression in his exposition of Lk 16:1-9 and 18:1-6: "Even in the midst of the immediately sinful act, Jesus sees the divine moment that is contained in it" (*\*Lehre von der Sünde*, 8).

<sup>214</sup> *Dogma*, 226.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, 226. Cf. *ibid.*, 263; *Ethik*, 204-05, 244-45.

ond, that he was a member of his nation and thus bound to the law."<sup>216</sup> Schlatter rejects "the heresy that God has betrayed or lost his will of creation [*Schöpfungswillen*]." Likewise, sin does not destroy the "orders of creation" [*Schöpfungsordnungen*].<sup>217</sup>

The power of the corrupt will does not reach so far as to eradicate our relation to God and completely destroy his work in us. Therefore, – through the organisation of our spirit and through our history – the motives are continuously given to us which make good will possible for us. This happens not only in the way that they [the motives] remain without effect and merely aggravate our fault [*Verschulden*] but that we can appropriate them and, in the action, complete them.<sup>218</sup>

The sinner remains embedded in nature and community and thus lives under God's government and guidance. "Because man does not fall out of nature he keeps his part in the divine endowment and guidance which nature mediates to him in the forming [*Bildung*] of his will and thinking."<sup>219</sup> On these grounds Schlatter affirms that human action generates "mixed results."

Our thinking neither produces only error nor only truth, but in the midst of our erring we also have true thoughts. Likewise, our volition is neither only malevolence nor only goodness but we have in the midst of our sinfulness also the good [*Gutes*]. Both states of affairs have the same reason, namely that we neither live in loneliness nor limited to ourselves, but are embraced by God's government.<sup>220</sup>

It is worth mentioning in passing that Schlatter explicates the mediation of God's providential action in terms of christological mediation. What stands behind the mediation of the divine gifts and guidance through nature is "the forgiveness and endowment that streams into humankind through Christ, through whom everything exists."<sup>221</sup> All of the aspects just outlined appear in Schlatter's account of a private session in which one of his students raises the question. "Why then do you not say that you are evil in everything that you think, will, and do?" Schlatter answers:

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<sup>216</sup> *Kennen wir Jesus?*, 215.

<sup>217</sup> See *\*Commentary on the Bethel Confession*, IV, p. 7 second correction, IV, p. 10 second correction. Schlatter articulates these ideas in direct opposition to the teaching of the early Dialectical Theology.

<sup>218</sup> *Dogma*, 226.

<sup>219</sup> *\*Commentary on the Bethel Confession*, IV, p. 11 second correction.

<sup>220</sup> *Dogma*, 227.

<sup>221</sup> *\*Commentary on the Bethel Confession*, IV, p. 11 second correction. Cf. Neuer, *Zusammenhang*, 181.

The reason I do not say this is because I would generate a completely wrong picture of myself if I only looked at myself – at me separated from God. That was the fallacy of the old doctrine of repentance: it enclosed the 'I' in itself and deprived it of its *life-connection* [*Lebenszusammenhang*] with God. In this way I too would, of course, only see nonsense, evil and misery in me. *However, I cannot and I must not imagine that I live remote from nature – that is remote from the divine work. I live through nature. I must also not imagine that I live remote from the power of the Christ – that is remote from the divine grace.* In order to achieve repentance the old doctrine placed man only before the commanding God. Yet we live not only in the commanding, but in the creating and giving God. In this an infinite amount of what we must not call 'sin' is given to us. Because you think, will and act with what is given to you by God, you are permitted to say about your thoughts that they are true, about your willing that it is right, and about your works that they are willed by God. Keep in mind that you work with what you have received, then you are finally and effectively protected from falling back into the old piety. Now you no longer ground your participation in God upon your achievements, and now even sinning regains its full and heavy seriousness to you. You sin when you pervert that which you have received (emphasis A. L.).<sup>222</sup>

In sum: for Schlatter to say that human being and action are nothing but sin would "turn man's apostasy vis-à-vis God into God's apostasy vis-à-vis man."<sup>223</sup> God in his faithfulness is the *active* and *exclusive* foundation of the human "capacity for the good." As Schlatter emphatically points out: "[T]he claim that we can think or do good without God, restricted to ourselves, is not only absurd but also, in itself, sin."<sup>224</sup>

#### c) Conclusion: man is *simul creatus et peccator*

Based on the material just outlined Schlatter concludes that sin is not an ontological constituent of the human being. "[T]he individual is under sin. This statement becomes distorted if it is replaced by the assertion that sin is human existence. This latter statement renders the individual synonymous with sin; Paul, however, distinguished between the two."<sup>225</sup> At this point Schlatter introduces a christological argument to the discussion. If sin and humanity were synonyms, the incarnation of God's Son would have made him a sin-

<sup>222</sup> *Sprechstunde*, 56-57.

<sup>223</sup> \**Commentary on the Bethel Confession*, IV, p. 11 second correction.

<sup>224</sup> *Dogma*, 577. Here Schlatter points out that he attempts to move beyond the antithesis of Augustinianism and Pelagianism. Cf. Schlatter's exposition of Ro 2:14-15 in *Romans*, 59-60. The reverse side of the idea of God as the enabling ground of doing and being good is that any attempt to establish morality without God results in a *de facto* atheism, a "negative theology" (see "Moral oder Evangelium," 96-97).

<sup>225</sup> *Romans*, 84.

ner. "The Christ as human person would be impossible if evil constituted an essential moment of human life."<sup>226</sup> Thus Schlatter takes the fact that Christ assumed the full and concrete reality of a human being, yet lived without sin, as an underpinning for the negation of sin as ontological constituent of the human being. In Schlatter's theology man is, and remains, above all, God's creature – man is *simul creatus et peccator*.<sup>227</sup> The ontological continuity of the human creature implied in this idea is, as we have seen Schlatter emphasizing, not established through the actuation of some creaturely capacities inherent in man, but exclusively grounded in God's providential action toward man. The *relation* in which even the sinner remains God's creature is the result of God's *otherness* in which he is able to act faithfully toward his creature and his own original purposes with creation.

#### iv. The actuality of sin in relation to the omni-activity of God

Schlatter's conception of the actuality of human sinfulness poses a set of serious questions to his notion of God's providence. At the heart of the matter lies the necessity to relate the sinner and his actions to God's activity since, according to Schlatter, all human being and action is constituted and enabled through the divine omni-activity. Of special significance in this connection is the relation between God's *gubernatio* and man's sinful rebellion against God and his purposes. Yet, the attempt to relate God's omni-activity and human sinfulness must be safeguarded against the idea that God is the originator of evil or sin (*auctor mali*). The following sections make clear that Schlatter does not leave these issues unreflected.

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<sup>226</sup> \**Christologie*, IV.

<sup>227</sup> See *Dogma*, 263. Schlatter's notion of a mixed condition belongs strictly to the context of *simul creatus et peccator* and must not be intermingled with the notion of *simul iustus et peccator*. Otherwise the picture of Schlatter's doctrine of sin becomes seriously distorted. This is the case in Kindt's exposition of Schlatter's hamartiology (see *Gedanke der Einheit*, 53-55, 133-34). Rieger's critique pinpoints the questionable aspects of Kindt's interpretation in all desirable clarity (see Rieger, *Rechtfertigungslehre*, 203-04).



a) Man as the subject of sinful actions

According to Schlatter, the origin of evil and sin is not in man but outside of himself, in Satan, whom Schlatter views as a fallen angel and leader of a kingdom of evil spirits.<sup>228</sup> The causation of human sin through Satan stands in line with the universal power of what Schlatter outlines as "flesh" and "world" although the evil power of Satan generates "new and original drives to sin" which transcend the causation mediated through nature and history.<sup>229</sup> Important for us is Schlatter's view that man – in his sinful acting – unites his will with the devil's will and acts according to the devil's law.<sup>230</sup> On this basis Schlatter draws a clear line of demarcation: "Through the existence of the sinful will the whole of human history is pervaded by *events which we must not derive from the divine creating but ascribe to our own causal power*" (emphasis A. L.).<sup>231</sup> Thus, Schlatter obviates the idea that God is the creator or author of evil and sin. "[O]ur life as it is determined by our evil will is known by God, but not made by him . . ." <sup>232</sup>

b) The dependence of the sinner upon God concerning the arising of sinful action

The rigid distinction between man, as the subject of sinful actions, and God does not undermine the supremacy of God in Schlatter. This supremacy reveals itself in the arising [*Entstehen*] of sin in a twofold way:

<sup>228</sup> For the following see *Dogma*, 258-62; Neuer, *Zusammenhang*, 188-89.

<sup>229</sup> *Dogma*, 262.

<sup>230</sup> See *ibid.*, 261.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, 262; cf. *ibid.*, 163: "Only the active self-determination of the self brings forth evil . . ."

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*, 337.

First, the causal freedom in which the sinner acts against God is given to him by God.<sup>233</sup> "Even in his rebellion against God man is not separated from the power of God which rules him. Even his power to resist from God . . ."<sup>234</sup> We see that Schlatter picks up one of the central themes of his notion of *imago Dei*. That man is a personal agent capable of free and self-determined action must not be conceived of as a limitation of God's supremacy but precisely as the result of his sovereign creating and ruling. "We do not take our freedom, but it is given to us; we do not have it without or against God, but through him."<sup>235</sup> The authenticity of the divine gift of freedom lies, as Schlatter argues, in the fact that God does not compel man to a life of faith in, and love for, God. God's self-determination to relate to man in such a way as to be appropriate to the particular identity of the human person is most clearly displayed when God – tempting man – forces the same to live his life in personal otherness vis-à-vis Godself. One could speak of a pedagogical moment in Schlatter's notion of divine action (*providentia* as *paidagogia Dei*):

[T]he placement into temptation is grace. It requires of me the own will and calls me to the appropriation of the received by means of own action, to the completion of receptivity by means of own activity. This compulsion to have an individual life – reason that not only sees but also judges; will that not only desires but also chooses; faith that is my own because in the face of negation it adheres to that which it affirms; love which is obedience because it recognises the difference between my will and God's will and unites the individual will with God's will, [this compulsion] is neither hardship nor heaviness but the revelation of the love that gives me life in order that I live it and grants me its gifts in order that I have them.<sup>236</sup>

The freedom of man, which is not only created but actively demanded by God, is consequently the necessary ground on which man is able to act in rebellion against God. In other words, man in his sinful acting is dependent upon God and his gifts.

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid., 262.

<sup>234</sup> *Glaube*, 364.

<sup>235</sup> *Dogma*, 155-56.

<sup>236</sup> "Natur, Sünde und Gnade," 55-56; similarly in *Dogma*, 175: God approaches man through his divine will and commandment. "Because obedience is required of us, our individual life is secured and any notion of melting with God becomes impossible." Cf. *ibid.*, 167: "The right to love cannot be ascribed to us without granting us the possibility to hate. However, the possibility to hate is given to us in order that we extinguish it through making love our will."

When God's relation to the creature is personal, then it is through the highest gift that the highest trial arises because the mightiest raising of the individual self happens precisely through the riches of the divine giving. However, when the gaze of the one who is particularly gifted turns toward himself, when his love bends back upon himself, a break emerges: the normal movement of life in which the highly gifted one places himself – including the complete glory of his individual life – under God is interrupted. Thus emerges an ascending movement without end, beyond God, against God, yet necessarily the sinking, the placement into the impotence of the unfulfillable striving, and the fall in its devastating horribleness will correlate to the original height at which the struggle with God had been dared.<sup>237</sup>

The dependence of the sinner upon God presents itself as the inverted mirror image of the *imago Dei*. Schlatter states: "Is the sinner God's creature, God's witness, God's image? Indeed, he is the latter exactly for reason of being the former."<sup>238</sup> This means that the image of God in man is not lost. Just the opposite – man would not be able to be a sinner without being the image of God, because sin is the volitional perversion of God's image.<sup>239</sup> However, the positive realisation of the God-likeness in which man was created has become impossible through sin.

Second, God's supremacy is revealed in that human sinfulness can only actuate itself on that which God has given to man.<sup>240</sup> In order to understand this fully we need to recall that Schlatter does not regard sin as an ontological constituent of the human being. The sinner remains primarily God's creature, whereas sin is only the second, the volitional abuse of God's creation. "Evil is not the first, but emerges from the good, the misuse and corruption of which it is."<sup>241</sup> As Schlatter vividly puts it, sin is "a metastasis," a "parasite . . . that owes its existence to the pure, God-formed constitution of our being."<sup>242</sup> Hence, the

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<sup>237</sup> *Dogma*, 259-60. The way in which P. Brunner grounds human freedom in God's sovereign self-determination to be the God for us and links this freedom with the possibility of human sin (see especially "Die Freiheit des Menschen," 113-16) is similar to Schlatter's thought.

<sup>238</sup> \**Schöpfung und Offenbarung*, 10.

<sup>239</sup> Helmut Burkhardt illustrates this approach when he calls sin the "negative sign in front of the brackets: - (1+1) = -2" (*Einführung in die Ethik*, 75).

<sup>240</sup> See *Dogma*, 262.

<sup>241</sup> "Selbstdarstellungen," 167; See also *Dogma*, 231; "Natur, Sünde und Gnade," 51-53; *Wir Christen und die Juden*, 13.

<sup>242</sup> \**Lehre von der Sünde*, 9. Cf. "Idealismus oder Theologie," 362-63.

dependence of the sinner upon God does not only concern the power to sin but extends to the concrete object, that is, God's good creation, as the antecedent condition for a sinful action. "It is, indeed, the case that everybody sins because everybody participates in God's goodness. Not to sin would only be possible for the one who had received nothing."<sup>243</sup>

c) The dependence of the sinner upon God concerning the result of sinful action

God's supremacy is also revealed in the result of man's sinful action in "that the choice we have made is accommodated by his reign [*von seiner Regierung aufgenommen*] and affirmed in its outcome."<sup>244</sup> Again, Schlatter draws on a central idea of his notion of divine providence, namely that God governs and steers the world in such a way that it is open to human actions and their results. This divine activity does not cease in the case of a sinful human act. The reason for this lies, according to Schlatter, in the fact "that God acts very seriously with us human beings."<sup>245</sup> God takes the human person seriously, even when the latter acts against God and his purposes. "Divine action and human will are inseparably intertwined in that which transpires. From the divine activity originates the individual's authority that is not taken from him, but rather is confirmed, even if he draws his will from his own selfish folly."<sup>246</sup> Hence, Schlatter argues "that the fire which sin ignites in man is not at all extinguished at once – that God does not come running in order to crush nasty seeds and neutralise them but lets them sprout and ripen to their bitter fruit."<sup>247</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> "Idealismus oder Theologie," 363. Cf. *Wir Christen und die Juden*, 13; *Andachten*, 245.

<sup>244</sup> *Dogma*, 262.

<sup>245</sup> *Gründe*, 81.

<sup>246</sup> *Romans*, 41.

<sup>247</sup> *Gründe*, 81.

## d) God's reaction to man's sinful action

In his attempt to relate God's omni-activity and human sin, yet without making God the originator of sin, Schlatter adopts the primary intention of the Lutheran-orthodox idea of divine *permissio*.<sup>248</sup> However, *permissio* must not be reduced to the passivity in which God restrains himself from making a sinful act impossible and from arbitrarily cancelling its results. Rather, God is actively involved with regard to the arising and the result of sin. Schlatter grounds this divine activity in God's self-determination to take man, whom he has created as personal agent, seriously – in his good as well as his sinful actions. These thoughts come to a culminating point in Schlatter's concept of the divine wrath, judgement and punishment.<sup>249</sup>

That God takes the sinful actions of man seriously can, according to Schlatter, be seen in his reaction to sin. "[G]od sets the power of his wrath against us" and "opposes all godlessness and unrighteousness through the inexorable power of his wrath."<sup>250</sup> In Schlatter, God's wrath is free of arbitrariness because it is the execution of the divine justice and, therefore, ethically qualified.

When we consider our own share in our relation to God through which our will participates in it, then the divine justice divides itself in two opposite actions because our will executes an opposite action. The evil will deserves resistance; in that God negates us, because we will evil, he is righteous. The good will deserves the affirmation; in that God adds to our good will his good will, he is righteous. Thus, righteousness is the generic term for wrath and goodness. It [righteousness] gives us the good as reward and the evil as sentence.<sup>251</sup>

In this context, Schlatter understands the divine goodness and grace as God's giving and the divine wrath as God's taking.

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<sup>248</sup> See Schmid, *Die Dogmatik der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*, 122-23; Ratschow, *Lutherische Dogmatik*, 222-23; Bernhardt, *Handeln Gottes*, 139-40.

<sup>249</sup> The biblical realism on the basis of which Schlatter develops his concept of God's wrath stands in direct antithesis to the theological attempts of his own time – especially that of A. Ritschl and his school – to remove the idea of God's wrath. God's history with Israel and the cross of Jesus serve Schlatter as examples in this context. See e.g. *Dogma*, 140-42, 570-71; Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter: ein Leben*, 231-32.

<sup>250</sup> *Gründe*, 81; similarly in *Dogma*, 141-42; *Romans*, 28; "Pforte zum Römerbrief," 57-58.

<sup>251</sup> *Dogma*, 182; cf. *Romans*, 30.

If God denies us his gifts, nothing in us remains the way it used to be. We lose what we have. If God does not illuminate, we become dark – for it is in his light that we see. If God does not enliven us, we die – for we live through him. The deprivation of the divine giving has very specific and positive consequences for us. That these consequences are foreseen, willed and effected [*gewirkt*] by God is expressed in the term 'wrath'.<sup>252</sup>

Schlatter underlines that the divine giving and taking are not to be co-ordinated on the same level. God's acts of wrath do not reveal him in the same way as his acts of grace

because only the giving is a primary, primordial act which does not need any precondition. The taking, however, presupposes a giving through which the life came into being (which the wrath destroys) – through which the goods were granted to us in the deprivation of which consists our suffering. The love of God is the free and complete cause, his own act in which he reveals himself. The wrath, however, has only space in the already-existing relationship with the creature. It requires a reason outside of God, a motive tied to what the creature does. God's grace is action, God's anger is reaction. Therefore, a causal relation consists between both in that the wrath can only emerge where the grace has preceded. Desecrated grace causes wrath. The latter is the protection of the divine love and gift against misuse and defilement.<sup>253</sup>

God's wrath is the result of man's sinful desecration of the divine grace and love. "For its [God's love] protection and preservation, God's will and action take their direction against us."<sup>254</sup> The deprivation of the divine giving is God's punishment, his "counteraction against evil" through which he inflicts suffering, pain, and ultimately, death upon man.<sup>255</sup> However, the divine punishment not only strikes man in his relation to nature and the human community, so to speak from outside, but also in his inner life.

The divine punishment consists in that the evil will is thwarted [*vereitelt*] and turned into an unfulfillable, always failing addiction that destroys us. This purpose already serves its first consequence, the guilty conscience. For in the compulsion to despise ourselves, we already suffer the punishment. Likewise, the consistency of the evil desire, which emerges out of the wrong choice, is a punishment. Our evil will is confirmed so that we now must have it as a suffering. The godlessness becomes incapacity for piety, the selfishness, incapacity for love, the sensual drive a vice.<sup>256</sup>

This is the point in Schlatter's concept at which the relation between God's omniscient activity and human sin is most immediate and strong. "God's punitive action toward hu-

<sup>252</sup> "Pforte zum Römerbrief," 61.

<sup>253</sup> *Dogma*, 144; see also "Der Herr hat gegeben," 114; "Pforte zum Römerbrief," 66.

<sup>254</sup> *Dogma*, 197-98.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, 139-40, 238-41; 246-51; *Romans*, 32-33.

<sup>256</sup> *Dogma*, 239. The German term *vereitelt* is interesting here because it has a twofold meaning. It means that something is made impossible. A plan is thwarted, actions are prevented, and hopes are shattered. At the same time the term means that something is rendered vain and idle. The human will is bent back upon itself.

mankind is effected by subjecting it to powers that force it to sin."<sup>257</sup> The divine wrath "brings about sin and destroys fellowship."<sup>258</sup> In Schlatter's view, "the connection between sin and God's wrath does not in the least deny that man acts in this through his own knowing and willing." Yet, the terrible and trembling dimension of sin is unveiled, namely

that it reaches far beyond the will of man and in no way stands still at that which man wills. It finds itself in him with coercive, natural power. This is the point where a divine activity is co-operative in the vice; for here laws are active which stand above our will and become effective independently of us – through which they show themselves as foundations and orders of God.<sup>259</sup>

e) Concluding observations on God's reign in the face of human sin

In Schlatter the origin of evil and sin is not in God but in Satan and man, for which reason history is full of sinful actions which must not be ascribed to God but to man. Schlatter's perception of the actuality of sin prevents him from developing an idealistic concept of history. History carries in itself the motive for fear "for the worst, which is in man, mania [*Wahn*] and hatred, rolls with imperishable force through the generations. The idea of regress is as well-grounded as the idea of progress."<sup>260</sup> History is, in Schlatter, not necessarily *Heilsgeschichte* but also *Unheilsgeschichte*. In his reflections on the relation of God's eternal will to human action and will Schlatter states:

We can only gain our statements about the divine will from the divine work and the latter brings forth history with its deep seriousness in which good and evil fight each other and the saving action withstands the ruinous action. And this divine work, which happens in history, reveals to us what the eternal will of God is.<sup>261</sup>

We have elaborated that Schlatter grounds the actuality and efficaciousness of sin in the divine omni-activity in which God creates and enables man to live as personal agent vis-à-

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<sup>257</sup> *Romans*, 42.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*, 32-33.

<sup>259</sup> "Pforte zum Römerbrief," 59; similarly in *Gründe*, 81-82.

<sup>260</sup> *Dogma*, 85.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*, 265. For history as the place of God's salvific action [*Heilshandeln*] see also Neuer, "Verständnis von Geschichte," 47.

vis Godself. Schlatter draws out these thoughts into his eschatology and explicates the seriousness of the history between God and man as the double outcome of the same. He argues

that – even in the final granting of the divine grace – man stands as the carrier of a personal life before God so that that, which he created with his own will, constitutes even for his eternal relationship to God the ground and possesses imperishable importance. Through this the elemental knowledge is once more confirmed . . . that God's creating invested us with a true life peculiar to us [*ein echtes, uns eignendes Leben*] and granted us power over our will and that the norms, which are set for us, have the unbreakable firmness of the divine will.<sup>262</sup>

However, Schlatter rejects "a dualistic view of history in which the complete relation of all events to God is denied."<sup>263</sup> God's supremacy and sovereignty remain unimpaired – not only with regard to the possibility and result of sin – but also in God's reaction to, and dealing with, man's sinful actions. Schlatter's argumentation rests upon his conviction that the power of Satan and sin must not be located on the same level with the power of God.<sup>264</sup>

Applied to man, Schlatter formulates this aspect as follows:

The individual has the authority to will and to act, yet he is not an autocrat and is not authorized to set his will in opposition to God's will and to produce works that contradict the divine work. Because he is the one who produces works, his action reaches its ultimate goal by means of the divine judgment.<sup>265</sup>

God will – in faithfulness to man and to himself – reach his good purpose with creation through his power, his will, his righteousness, and, ultimately, his love.<sup>266</sup> Schlatter speci-

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<sup>262</sup> *Dogma*, 550-51. An adequate interpretation of Schlatter's idea that God – in his creative and providential omni-activity – founds and enables history cannot get around the aforementioned affirmations of Schlatter. They make clear what shall concern us again at a later point, namely that, in Schlatter, the notion of God's omni-activity does not lead to a monistic concept of divine action for which reason Schlatter does not confuse history with *Heilsgeschichte*. When Steck, in his study *Idee der Heilsgeschichte*, accuses Schlatter's "naive" idea of history of a "forceful monism" and of an "axiomatically presupposed harmony between the work of the divine Spirit and the course of history" (pp. 38-42), then our investigation gives us all reason to return this critique in its original harshness. Steck's undifferentiated study fails to do justice to Schlatter's concept.

<sup>263</sup> *Dogma*, 260.

<sup>264</sup> See *ibid.*, 260-61; *Johannes*, 5-6.

<sup>265</sup> *Romans*, 51.

<sup>266</sup> See *Dogma*, 147.



fies this divine activity in a way that reminds us of the Lutheran-orthodox concepts of *impeditio*, *directio* and *determinatio*.<sup>267</sup>

God counteracts the effects of sin (*impeditio*). "It is certain that God's government penetrates all events for which reason the generation of a complete un-nature [*Unnatur*] is impossible for any creaturely will. . . . This, however, is the case with every diabolic activity, for it is a vain battle against the Almighty."<sup>268</sup> The idea that "no will directed against God can reach its goal"<sup>269</sup> stands, as we were able to show, behind Schlatter's concept of man as *simul creatus et peccator*: "The power of the corrupt will does not reach so far as to eradicate our relation to God and completely destroy his work in us."<sup>270</sup>

God is able to steer and direct the evil actions of man in such a way that they serve His purposes (*directio*). The effects of sin "remain embraced" and "are accommodated by the divine governance."<sup>271</sup> This applies also to the power of Satan. It is subjected to God and serves him in the execution of his righteousness and the revelation of his wrath.<sup>272</sup> It is precisely in the surrender of man to the power of Satan that God's *directio* is revealed as bringing about consequences which transcend the will and the intention of the sinful agent. Schlatter refutes the idea which reduces God's righteous government "to its recompensing function" and limits it "to the aspect of completing our acting in its consequences."<sup>273</sup> A key to interpreting or calculating God's reign is not given to man: "God's independence remains unimpaired and crosses all our calculations. This is true concerning the greatness

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<sup>267</sup> See Ratschow, *Lutherische Dogmatik*, 223-24.

<sup>268</sup> *Dogma*, 260.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*, 226; see above, p. 62 n. 218.

<sup>271</sup> See *ibid.*, 262, *Ethik*, 108.

<sup>272</sup> See *Dogma*, 260-61.

<sup>273</sup> See *ibid.*, 182-85.

of his giving and his forbearance as well as the seriousness in which he effects judgement."<sup>274</sup>

God determines boundaries through which human sin is limited in its power and range (*determinatio*). Schlatter understands this as a divine activity through which "the corruption arising from evil is kept away from the individual."<sup>275</sup> In this connection Schlatter talks about God's foreknowledge and predestination:

The divine thinking orders the course of the world [*Weltprozess*] in total as well as the life-history of the individual according to a measure which he determines for them so that their results are yet retarded. This happens to our limitation as a sign that we are ruled. In a roundabout way, it happens to us as grace, as a sign that redemption and completion are yet kept open to us.<sup>276</sup>

In Schlatter, teleological governing and steering (*gubernatio*) in the face of human sinfulness is ultimately grounded in God's creative power. "Above the causal chain of things in the worldly realm stands the one for whom everything is possible, the one whom no coercion of the situation binds, no power of man hinders, the one who always remains the free one over against the world, the God who does miracles."<sup>277</sup> In due course we shall see how Schlatter specifies God's creative power as the power of grace and love. For now it suffices to note that Schlatter regards God's creative activity as the sole ground on which the divine purposes with this world and humankind come to completion. For God does not merely react against sin but finally overcomes it through his creative grace and love. In the sovereign, free and spontaneous creativity of his grace, God grants man a new beginning.<sup>278</sup> The utmost actuation and revelation of this divine creativity has taken place in God's economy of salvation the culminating point of which is the cross of Jesus Christ. It stands as a strange anomaly in a sinful world in which God and man are related according to the rule

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<sup>274</sup> Ibid., 185.

<sup>275</sup> *Romans*, 49.

<sup>276</sup> *Dogma*, 51.

<sup>277</sup> *Kennen wir Jesus?*, 390.

<sup>278</sup> See e.g. "Vergebung und Rechtfertigung," 30.

of recompense. "Here, [in Christ's word and work] the creative righteousness of God, which does not consist in the recompense of our goodness or evil, but which orders God's relation to us according to his good will, becomes effective."<sup>279</sup> It is therefore only consequent when Schlatter speaks of justification and forgiveness as the revelation of God's all-powerful and creative grace, as God's masterpiece, and the triumph of his grace.<sup>280</sup> It is to this saving economy that we now turn.

### 3. God – the Saviour of Humanity

#### A. Divine action toward man: the cross as Jesus' regal act and the reality of salvation

Central to Schlatter's notion of God's work of salvation is the idea of reconciliation. It is Jesus, the Christ of God, who reconciles God and humankind through his death on the cross:

The regal act of Jesus was his cross. Through this proof of his reign he removes all human theories and postulates, destroys all false images of God, fights everything that man calls religion, and, as the sick condition of human religions requires it, creates a new God-consciousness, one which is truth. Through this he works man's reconciliation with God which cannot come about as long as man conceals the true God from himself through a distorted image of God.<sup>281</sup>

God's reconciling work in Christ has a twofold thrust: it consists in the extinction and forgiveness of sin and in the justification of the sinner. "What has happened is not only the unveiling and removal of what separates us from God but also the granting of his communion with us, the founding of the new covenant."<sup>282</sup> The cross of Jesus is the "elimination of all false religiosity" but at the same time "the affirmation and completion [of] everything

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<sup>279</sup> *Dogma*, 437; see also "Das Kreuz Jesu," 11-13.

<sup>280</sup> See e.g. "Wunder der Bibel," 77; "Vergebung der Sünden," 18, 20; "Zwei Scharen von Hoffenden," 317; *Andachten*, 20; *Kennen wir Jesus?*, 41.

<sup>281</sup> *Dogma*, 290. For more details on how exactly the cross reveals the true God and destroys man's false god's see *ibid.*, 295-96; "Kreuz Jesu," 7-14.

<sup>282</sup> *Dogma*, 295.

that leads us to the remembrance of God."<sup>283</sup> To put it differently, Schlatter rejects the view that "the Christ is only therefore indispensable because we are sinners." The evil is that which, indeed, "places us in need of the Christ," and the sinfulness of man is that which "determined the course of Jesus' work," yet, "again the negative aspect emerges only out of the positive one. The need that arises from sin has, above itself, the need that arises from our positive destiny [*Bestimmung*] – from the fact that we should become a community."<sup>284</sup> Schlatter attempts to hold both aspects together. Because the cross reveals "God's holiness in which his power and love, his judgement and grace are united . . . it uniformly and simultaneously grants us faith and penitence."<sup>285</sup> Hence Christ's reconciling work moves beyond restoration toward completion. Schlatter writes:

That Christ does not merely restore man's former glory but brings it to completion is revealed with regard to reconciliation, in that it does not merely demonstrate already-existing love but represents *a new act of love, which is at the same time more profound and more lofty than anything God has done up to this point*. Reconciliation overcomes the broken communion between God and sinners by being

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<sup>283</sup> Ibid., 295. The expression "everything that leads us to the remembrance of God" refers to what we have outlined above as human God-relatedness.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid., 81. Cf. *Wir Christen und die Juden*, 13. In a similar way, Gunton distinguishes between "the sin of the creature" as "the formal or immediate cause" and "the eternal will of God for fellowship with the creature" as "the first cause" of the incarnation of the Son (*Christ and Creation*, 96; see also "Christology: Two Dogmas Revisited," 155).

The sentences quoted here underline the correlation between Schlatter's concept of the cross and his concept of sin. He counsels caution not to let the concept of sin dominate theology. This would lead to a distorted understanding of nature, God, and the work of Jesus: "When creation disappeared behind the fall, was there still any positive relation to nature? When God's revelation consisted in sending the saviour of sinners [*Sünderheiland*], did not the picture of God remain poor? When Jesus' work consisted merely in the removal of guilt, was he still the Lord of the church, the Creator of the community united in him?" ("Selbstdarstellungen," 167; see also "Unsere kirchliche Arbeit," 269).

It is in this context that Schlatter expresses his reservations about Anselm's theory of the cross. Schlatter calls it rationalism to start with an attribute of God's nature and deduce the meaning of the cross from there. This leads to the construction of a "necessity that even he [God] himself must obey," to a "hypostatisation of categories the web of which is to inescapably enclose even God." The danger is to lose God as the active subject of reconciliation (see *Dogma*, 297, 303-05; *Jesu Gottheit*, 39; \**Christologie*, 30, 33). Yet, Schlatter also attacks the opposite tendencies of his contemporary theology, especially the Ritschl-school, which describes the cross exclusively as an act toward man and reduces it to anthropology. Schlatter argues to hold the theocentric and anthropocentric aspect of Jesus' death together. Christ acted as priest toward God and toward man (see *Dienst*, 79-82). For a deeper investigation of these ideas in Schlatter see Rieger, *Rechtfertigungslehre*, 307-26.

<sup>285</sup> *Dogma*, 296.

more powerful in effect and richer in gift than what had been forfeited and destroyed through man's enmity (emphasis A. L.).<sup>286</sup>

Schlatter emphasises the single, unique and historical dimension of the cross by outlining that Jesus has worked not only the *possibility* of reconciliation, but its *reality*.

The one by whom God justifies and reconciles is the Christ; both acts together constitute uniformly the substance of his messianic calling. They are completed in Christ, so that our part is not to effect but to receive them. They therefore possess a universal scope and are given to the world, because they reach as far as Christ's rule extends.<sup>287</sup>

This quote indicates that Schlatter distinguishes between the reality and the effectiveness of salvation rather than between the possibility and the realisation of salvation.<sup>288</sup>

## **B. The appropriation of salvation through faith in Christ**

Schlatter's emphasis on the reality of salvation, on the universal scope of Christ's work, does not cause him to view the personal appropriation of salvation as superfluous. The reality of salvation becomes effective in man through faith in Christ. Schlatter links the different aspects when he continues the quotation above as follows:

But since they [justification and reconciliation] do not become man's own as long as they remain transcendent and unconscious, they are offered to him for his personal appropriation which, because we are here confronted with a divine activity and gift, takes place through faith, and in particular faith in Christ, because justification and reconciliation are linked for us with Christ, and faith places us in communion with the Christ.<sup>289</sup>

### **i. Faith as an anthropological category**

In Schlatter, faith is not only a soteriological but also an anthropological category:

Faith is an affirmative judgement about a representation which is distinguished from its logical acknowledgement in that the faithful does not merely express the correctness of a representation but executes its implantation into his life-act. Through faith we make a representation effective for us so that it is valid for our thinking as well as for our acting.<sup>290</sup>

<sup>286</sup> *Theology of the Apostles*, 246. See also *\*Christologie*, fragments.

<sup>287</sup> *Theology of the Apostles*, 246. Cf. *Dogma*, 297-99, 438.

<sup>288</sup> The terms "reality of salvation" (*Heilswirklichkeit*) and "effectiveness of salvation" (*Heilswirksamkeit*) are taken from Rieger, *Rechtfertigungslehre*, 327-30.

<sup>289</sup> *Theology of the Apostles*, 246.

<sup>290</sup> *Dogma*, 107. Cf. *Gründe*, 32.

The distinctive feature of faith is a personal and relational one that consists in the existential affirmation, in an act of volitional devotion that takes place even if one's knowing remains incomplete.<sup>291</sup> "Faith requires a will, true faith requires a true will, and the rejection of faith comes about through a wrong will."<sup>292</sup> Yet, for Schlatter this does not mean "that ignorance and the incapacity to know are essential characteristics of faith." Although he gives primacy to volition, he elaborates that all three of the personal functions of man participate interactively in the act of faith. Without exercising them "faith could come about only through an arbitrary decision that would mean a violation of the intellect and create a serious inner conflict."<sup>293</sup>

Since man in all of his personal functions is primarily receptive, faith is a gift rather than a human work. "In no authentic relationship of faith does faith come into being as our own work. For the object that testifies itself to us as credible can never be produced by us . . . Yet, not only the perception of the object but also its relationship to us, through which the drive to trust is granted to us, exists prior to our volition."<sup>294</sup> Hence, what determines faith is not the subject, but the object of faith. For this reason, Schlatter argues for different degrees of faith. Faith in an object is always limited; whereas, faith in another person can reach the degree of a "complete attachment that determines the whole self."<sup>295</sup>

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<sup>291</sup> See *Dogma*, 108.

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*, 108. In this context Schlatter elaborates the relation between knowing and faith and concludes: "We have to know in order to believe and to believe in order to know" (*ibid.*, 112, 569 n. 77; cf. *\*Wesen und Quellen*, 60). For the same mutuality between faith and listening see "Glaube an die Bibel," 238.

<sup>294</sup> *Dogma*, 111.

<sup>295</sup> See *ibid.*, 109-12.

## ii. Faith as a soteriological category

The distinct mark of Christian faith is, according to Schlatter, that it has its content and point of reference in Christ. Jesus, in his person and work, addresses the human being in its totality. In other words, in Jesus man encounters humanity in its fullness. Schlatter outlines that every creaturely characteristic of man, from which the God-consciousness evolves, is met in Christ. "The encounter with him awakes our God-consciousness."<sup>296</sup> When man is exposed to the divine reality of salvation "a correspondence emerges between what Jesus offers us and that which feeds ourselves with the remembrance of God. Through what we see in him, that which we probably perceive only unclearly in ourselves is transfigured into a clear knowledge."<sup>297</sup> The cross of Jesus confronts man with the reality of his sin and, at the same time, with the reality of forgiveness and justification. Jesus, in proposing himself to us as the Christ, reveals God's work of salvation, divine goodness and love. The person and work of Jesus is, as Schlatter emphatically underlines, the one and only basis on which man actively appropriates salvation.

When I am able to believe, I have found the one who in my inmost being gives me a present, the one who gives me my will in that he makes his will my own will. When I believe in Jesus, he has unified me with himself. When I believe in God, he has subordinated me to himself. . . . Everything faith is worth and achieves is dependent upon the one in whom we believe. It [faith] does not have any productive power in itself, but is worth exactly as much as the one in whom we believe. One can hear many psychological statements about faith, that it does this and that, that it knows, that it justifies, etc. All this is nonsense. Faith does nothing, rather the one in whom we believe does, and we as believers do what the one in whom we believe wills.<sup>298</sup>

The relation between the objective reality of salvation and its subjective appropriation through faith is not a "nevertheless" but a "therefore." In this sense, Schlatter does not only

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<sup>296</sup> Ibid., 480.

<sup>297</sup> *Gründe*, 67. Cf. *Dogma*, 278-79, 480-81. "Then, when the remembrance of Christ unites itself with the God-consciousness, faith in him is there. It [faith] comes about through the fact that the certainty of divine grace awakes in us through the knowledge of Jesus" (*Dogma*, 480).

<sup>298</sup> \**Vom Glauben*, 1-2. We owe the references to this manuscript to Rieger, *Rechtfertigungslehre*, 255-56. Cf. Schlatter's critical comment on Emil Brunner: "In Brunner's forceful and awakening work on 'the Mediator' I read once again one of these confused sentences which describe faith as an independently existing entity to which a number of activities are ascribed" (*Erlebtes*, 73).

speak of the "motive of faith" but of man's "authorisation to believe [*Ermächtigung*]," the "enabling and obligation to believe [*Befähigung und Verpflichtung*]."<sup>299</sup> The imperative to believe is grounded in the indicative – the reality of salvation.

All three of the personal functions are involved in faith. Moreover, because of the interrelatedness between man as personal being and nature, history and community, everything that marks human being participates in the act of faith.<sup>300</sup> Man in his totality opens himself up to Christ: "When we believe, the foothold [*Stützpunkt*] of our life is transferred out of ourselves upwards into the giving God. . . . For faith is the affirmation of the divine work shown to us, the reception of the Word spoken to us, the opening to the gift offered to us, the affiliation with the Lord given to us."<sup>301</sup> Yet, Schlatter regards faith in Christ primarily as an act of that function in which the person is most free and active, namely volition. He uses different terms to express this, e.g. "synthesis of will;" "choosing will;" "volitional affirmation;" "decision," "choice."<sup>302</sup> On this basis, Rieger aptly summarises Schlatter's notion of faith as "the conscious, volitional and personal connection [*Anschluss*] with Christ, which is mediated through the Word."<sup>303</sup>

Schlatter's notion of mediation plays an important role in this context. As we have seen, faith in Christ is mediated through the different constituents of the human being, the creaturely reality of humanness. Besides this, Schlatter points to a second level of mediation. In his *Dogma* he elaborates the "media of grace," a term that stands for "those proc-

<sup>299</sup> *Dogma*, 480; *Gründe*, 33 (in above order).

<sup>300</sup> See *Dogma*, 110-14, 482-84. To outline this notion is one of Schlatter's intentions in his *Gründe*. Schlatter not only focusses on the three personal functions but also on the recognition of sin and the significance of nature, community and history (see *Gründe*, 30-63).

<sup>301</sup> "Natur, Sünde und Gnade," 65.

<sup>302</sup> See *Dogma*, 480-81; *\*Vom Glauben*, 1, 3; *Dienst*, 42-46. "For once let us dare a psychological formula in order to name the process that takes place in us when we believe. What emerges in faith is a synthesis of will" (*\*Vom Glauben*, 1).

<sup>303</sup> Rieger, *Rechtfertigungslehre*, 281. Schlatter's term *Anschluss*, which we have translated so far with "affiliation" or "connection" also has the connotation of "union" or "communion."



esses which establish the relationship between Jesus and our presence and, thus, make Christianity possible."<sup>304</sup> In this setting, Schlatter unfolds his notions of the apostolate, Scripture, Christian community and church, and the sacraments.<sup>305</sup> The encounter with Christ (faith as existential devotion to Christ) is mediated and effected through these "media of grace."

We need to pause here and review Schlatter's argument thus far. His concept of faith is shaped by the tandem of passivity and activity, receptivity and productivity in their typical arrangement in which Schlatter gives primacy to passivity and receptivity. This pattern experiences an intensification in faith in Christ. Faith, as active, conscious and volitional devotion to Christ, is completely dependent on the latter and, therefore, primarily not to be seen as man's work. Yet the question that arises at this point is how exactly Schlatter understands the relation between passivity and activity. Is it one of succession in which the reality of salvation approaches man from outside and merely triggers the human response to it? Does man appropriate salvation by virtue of exercising his personal functions, e.g. some kind of free will?<sup>306</sup> It is the burden of the next section to examine how Schlatter deals with these questions.

### **C. Divine action in man: the mediation of salvation through the Holy Spirit**

#### **i. The human impossibility of salvific faith and the necessity of a divine intervention**

Schlatter asserts that the encounter with Christ does not automatically lead to faith in him by some kind of coercive, magical, or mechanical process. In this context, Schlatter

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<sup>304</sup> *Dogma*, 357. Cf. *ibid.*, 489-90.

<sup>305</sup> *Ibid.*, 358-436.

<sup>306</sup> Schlatter has, indeed, been interpreted in this way. See for example Kindt, *Gedanke der Einheit*, 137-39. The author here places Schlatter in the tradition of the "Western-Catholic doctrine of salvation," accuses him of rejecting the notion of the *servum arbitrium*, and sets Schlatter in antithesis to the Lutheran doctrine of salvation.

highlights four major factors:<sup>307</sup> First, Jesus' earthly work belongs to the past while his heavenly reign belongs to the sphere of invisibility. This rules out any sensory perception which could convince man. Second, the end of Jesus' life bears an intrinsic drive to reject faith in him. The Christ on the cross, the resurrection, the ascension and the presence of Jesus all transcend human experience and "remain an impenetrable mystery for us." Third, the actual state and reality of Jesus' work, e.g. the shape of his church, is in contrast to what Jesus has promised us. Fourth, Jesus' call to faith "generates a hard collision with our selfish drive" and, hence, is diametrically opposed to sinful human nature. "Therefore, we all have a powerful drive toward unbelief in us. Every sin carries this drive toward unbelief with itself, and this with remaining and continuous power."<sup>308</sup>

All these aspects require faith as a personal, existential and volitional devotion to Christ. Not even Jesus himself removed the ambiguity which comes about when man as sinful creature encounters the person and work of God's incarnate Son. "Nothing on Jesus' side happens that saves us from making our own decision for him."<sup>309</sup> If faith came about automatically it would cease to be faith. Yet God's work of salvation, the "reality of realities," is not in itself, but in man who perceives it, an ambiguous one. It leads to the "authorisation to believe" but also, as we may call it, to the impossibility of impossibilities. Schlatter points out that ". . . the more carefully we observe the processes that contribute to faith, the better we understand that it [faith] can appear to us as a strange anomaly within the . . . course of the world."<sup>310</sup> In other words, "[w]e helplessly stand before the obligation

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<sup>307</sup> For the following see *Dogma*, 481; "Jesus und wir heutigen Menschen," 204-07; "Glaube an die Bibel," 234-35; "Bekenntnis zur Gottheit Jesu," 44-46; *Briefe*, 49-51. Schlatter's thoughts in this context are closely linked with his idea that even in the person and work of Christ we do not have an immediate perception of God (see e.g. *\*Wesen und Quellen*, 10, 158; *\*Dogma und Geschichte*, 8).

<sup>308</sup> "Glaube an die Bibel," 235.

<sup>309</sup> *Dogma*, 481; similarly *ibid.*, 157.

<sup>310</sup> *Gründe*, 71.

to faith as long as the entanglement in the centre of our life, in the sphere of our volition, is not unravelled."<sup>311</sup> The need is for "the creative intervention of the divine grace which gives us the new will."<sup>312</sup>

In the foregoing observations we have roughly sketched Schlatter's understanding of the impossibility of faith. The kernel of the problem emerging now could be summarised as follows: On the basis of the reality of salvation established in Christ, God wants man to respond to and appropriate this reality. Divine salvific action aims at faith as man's volitional affirmation of, and dedication to, Christ, that is, a personal connection with Christ. Yet, at the same time, the reality of sin makes exactly that which is required of man impossible. God himself is required to establish the reality of salvation in man by means of an all-powerful intervention. But how then is it possible to uphold the idea of faith as an authentic human response?

## ii. The creative action of the Spirit

Schlatter approaches the intricate issue just outlined by introducing the Holy Spirit as the second mediator of divine grace and salvation besides Jesus.

The Spirit is the *perpetual visualisation* of God in the course of history, whereas the mission of the Son distinguishes a *moment* of it [history] as revelatory act. . . . This visualisation of God takes place in our inward life. In the Spirit, God's work happens inside of us. . . . Thus, his mission is perfect grace, the institution of true religion, and union of man with God. For our own thinking and volition is turned toward God through the Spirit. The divine does not merely approach us from outside and is not merely gained through the appropriation of something foreign to us; rather, through the Spirit, God's gift becomes our property, and in addition to the guidance from outside we now also receive the guidance of our life through God from inside (emphasis A. L.).<sup>313</sup>

<sup>311</sup> *Dogma*, 278. Cf. *ibid.*, 220 where Schlatter argues that "even if the intellectual hindrances are overcome and a strong God-consciousness arises" it is not in man's power to become religious and believe.

<sup>312</sup> *Gründe*, 52.

<sup>313</sup> *Dogma*, 343-44. Cf. *ibid.*, 353; *Gründe*, 68-69.

Through the Spirit, the Christ for us becomes the Christ in us – for which reason "our being-in-Christ and the Spirit's being-in-us is the same process."<sup>314</sup> This work can no longer be understood as an "enabling" or "authorisation" to appropriate salvation but as a new creation. Hence, Schlatter explicates the generation of faith as "a miracle veiled in the mystery of the creative act." This miracle is performed by the Holy Spirit who is "the creative grace that takes charge of our inner man and places the certainty of God in our thinking in order to bestow on us the love that transforms our life into the service of God."<sup>315</sup>

The usage of creation language directs our attention to an important aspect of Schlatter's understanding of the transition from the old man to the new. There is a moment of complete human passivity and of the sole, sovereign and all-powerful activity of God. This becomes clear when Schlatter discusses the traditional Reformation teaching on conversion. He affirms that "the beginning of the Christian life is constituted by a moment of complete passivity" of man:

Without doubt, we go through moments in which God alone works and we are only caused and shaped, but these creative acts of God are not perceivable events within our conscious interlinking of thought and will. Where God works alone, we do not participate, not even with our consciousness, not even as watching witnesses, as if we could observe the process of our creation and watch how God makes our volition, that is, ourselves.<sup>316</sup>

We encounter here again Schlatter's respect for any kind of divine mystery.<sup>317</sup> The actual creative act of the Spirit remains veiled, yet its result is recognisable.

That which is conceivable for our eyes and which is, therefore, immediately part of our volition, is the result of the divine creating. It is the 'I' created by God, the thinking of truth, and the willing of goodness that God has radiated into us. Therefore, viewed from our perspective there is no moment in our life-history in which the grace makes us merely passive. Neither is there one moment in which we

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<sup>314</sup> *Dogma*, 352.

<sup>315</sup> *Gründe*, 71.

<sup>316</sup> *Dienst*, 46. For a thorough discussion of the issues occupying us here see also Rieger, *Rechtfertigungslehre*, 274-80.

<sup>317</sup> For Schlatter's understanding of God's creative activity as a miracle and a mystery see above, p. 20. Because of the miraculous and mysterious character of God's creative action Schlatter rejects any schematism about the "how" and "when" of the beginning of Christian life (see e.g. *Dogma*, 462-63; "Fröhlichs Traktat," 280-81). See also Neuer, *Zusammenhang*, 231-32; Rieger, *Rechtfertigungslehre*, 351.

could appear to ourselves as independent and self-sufficient, as though it were not by God's giving that we have been raised into the thinking of truth and the willing of goodness.<sup>318</sup>

The point to be noted here is Schlatter's realism when he talks about divine creating. The Spirit is creative in the fullest sense of the word: "We, as a whole, are God's work; it is us, not something in us, that the Spirit renews and guides; it is us, not without our consciousness but in such a way that he gives us consciousness and will. The passivity in which we are thus placed has its aim and result in our activity."<sup>319</sup> This second aspect of the work of the Holy Spirit is crucial to Schlatter. The actuality of God's creative action in the Spirit does not negate, annihilate or destroy the creature. The mediation of salvation through Christ and in the Holy Spirit does not eclipse the personal functions of man but lifts them up to a new fullness. God's Spirit affirms and enables human creatureliness. Applying this insight to the question about free will, human choice and the appropriation of salvation, Schlatter formulates as follows:

In the godless state we can talk about free choice only in the sense that we again and again unite ourselves with our corrupted desire and recognise and will it as our own being. However, in conversion and also in our continuous renewal the category of choice experiences its fullest application. For through grace there awakes a good will in the midst of our corrupted desire, and this in order that we affirm it as ours, unite ourselves with it, and through it extinguish and reject our evil desire.<sup>320</sup>

In other words, the Spirit creates the new will in such a way that man wills the Spirit's will as his own. In the act of absolute passivity and dependence, when the Spirit creates what man cannot bring about, the latter experiences the fullness of human creatureliness, activity

<sup>318</sup> *Dienst*, 46. In a very similar fashion Schlatter states: "We always only ever perceive the fruits of those processes which create life and we never enter into the workshop in which God's finger creates life and faith" ("Glaube und Geschichte," 347).

<sup>319</sup> *Dogma*, 351.

<sup>320</sup> *Dienst*, 43. The ideas just outlined show again that Schlatter diverges from the theological tradition which – enforced through Kant and Schleiermacher – regards human feeling as the sole locus of the work of the Holy Spirit. The intention behind this approach is, as Schlatter points out, to secure the sovereignty, immediacy and irresistibility of God's pneumatological work in man. In opposition to this tradition, Schlatter insists that the work of the Spirit not only takes place in the feeling of the person, but also in those functions in which man is most active and free, namely thinking and volition (see *Dienst*, 38-51 and Schlatter's grappling with Karl Friedrich Nösgen's pneumatology in "Noch ein Wort," 114-21). Through his approach Schlatter also wants to rule out any synergistic notion of the appropriation of salvation in which the passive part is ascribed to God and the active part to man (see *Dogma*, 351). See further what has been said about Schlatter's totalisation of Schleiermacher's approach (see above, p. 19 n. 27).

and freedom – and thus recognises and affirms the new creation as deeply his own. The Holy Spirit relates the divine and the human in such a way that the primacy, superiority and sovereignty of God does not destroy the identity and distinctiveness of man.

### iii. Conclusion

The salvation of man is an exclusive and all-powerful act of God. Yet, this act neither violates, nor circumvents, nor absorbs man's creaturely being and constitution. Rather, it constitutes human being and action and is thus enabling and bestowing action. It leaves space for man to affirm and respond to God's action in a way that is appropriate to man's nature. Thus, Schlatter can state, in tacit reference to Phil 2:12-13: "Because God works both the willing and the acting, we work out our salvation with fear and trembling. That God's giving does not destroy but establish our personal vivacity, including our will, is an established axiom in the New Testament."<sup>321</sup> The ramifications of these ideas for Schlatter's way of relating divine and human action will be explored in due course.

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<sup>321</sup> *Dogma*, 157.

### CHAPTER III. SCHLATTER'S THEORY OF DIVINE ACTION

The foregoing chapter stands as a representation of Schlatter's understanding of the ways in which God acts when he works creation, preservation and salvation. In the present chapter we shall deepen our understanding of the above material and unfold what might be called Schlatter's theory of divine action. The reader might object at this point, arguing that the material presented thus far does not provide a sufficient basis for developing Schlatter's theory of divine agency because only a fraction of the manifold works of God has been explored. This objection brings us to a central point of Schlatter's approach. He is convinced that the manifoldness of God's actions cannot be comprehended and is thus difficult to categorise and order. "The causal power of God encompasses – incomprehensible to us – a diversity of activities which are qualitatively distinguished from one another. The view that the divine causality shows itself in a single form stems from an emptied idea of unity [*aus dem entleerten Einheitsgedanken*]."<sup>1</sup> This means that the basic categories of a theory of divine agency cannot be found by merely looking at the sequence of God's works as they appear on the *heilsgeschichtliche* level.<sup>2</sup> For this reason it is unnecessary to investigate Schlatter's understanding of every single work of God. Rather, in the foregoing chapter we have introduced certain continuities which conceptually underlie Schlatter's notion of divine agency. In the following we shall deepen our understanding of these continuities and develop, as we may call it, Schlatter's understanding of the dimensions, the mode and the

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<sup>1</sup> *Dogma*, 37.

<sup>2</sup> A case in point is the attempt to capture the manifoldness and diversity of divine agency through the triad of creation, redemption and completion.

structure of divine action. This inquiry shall enable us to outline Schlatter's concept of the relation between God and man as the direct outcome of his theory of divine action.

### **1. Schlatter's Awareness of the Problematic Aspects of a Theory of Divine Action**

When we take some of the intricate aspects of a theory of divine action as the point of departure for our inquiry, we are actually working in the opposite direction to the movement in Schlatter's thought. For he is convinced that the problems, especially those which arise when theology enters into dialogue with other sciences, must not determine *a priori* the nature and style of theological discourse. The questions to be asked arise primarily out of the theologian's engagement with the theological material.<sup>3</sup> However, for reasons of clarity and pithiness we begin by presenting some critical aspects of which Schlatter is constantly aware when he talks about divine action.

#### **A. Divine transcendence, divine action and the pitfall of monism**

##### **i. God's transcendence and his active involvement with the world**

In our exposition of Schlatter's understanding of divine economy we encountered two fundamental claims: First, God relates to, and acts upon creation, in such a way that his relation and action constitute the ontological basis for creaturely being and action. Second, God transcends creation. As creator he stands beyond this world. Both aspects will continue to concern us throughout this study. The point to be noted here is Schlatter's awareness that abstract and impersonal concepts of divine transcendence give rise to a problematic notion of the relation of divine transcendence and divine involvement with creation. Although Schlatter also applies the category of being to God and speaks explicitly about

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<sup>3</sup> See e.g. *Ethik*, 43 n. 2; *Briefe*, 47.



"the eternal nature of the divine life" and "God's eternal being,"<sup>4</sup> he delimitates himself from understanding God as the "highest being" or "pure being."<sup>5</sup> This static-essential concept of God is, according to Schlatter, the result of a "Greek theology" rooted in Hellenistic philosophy. The latter grounds its concept of God in a philosophy of nature part of which is that man a) "learns to distinguish himself from that which stands below him" and b) "learns that the spirit transcends that which is materially bound."<sup>6</sup> Thus emerges a deep contempt for creaturely particularity and diversity.

Wherever the old Greek logic exercises its rule, that which is individual becomes a scandal. It is regarded as the accidental, the unessential, the transient, the veiling of the idea, that which turns the divine into a larva through a being there and a being now, the bark around the tree, the shell around the kernel, and so forth.<sup>7</sup>

For Schlatter, these ideas give rise to a concept of God which is developed in stark contrast to the world as the non-divine. As Schlatter states:

This way of thinking [*Denkweise*] regards the particular as nothing and the general and the type as real. Out of this idea emerged the rule that God is to be thought of as the most abstract, the 'pure being,' or – because we still think about something with this thin abstraction – as the super real, as that which stands beyond the antithesis of ideal and real, as the completely empty absolute.<sup>8</sup>

The critical point of this theology is that it, in its "veneration of the abstract," separates God from his works and actions. The idea of God is constructed through negations as a result of which "the relation between the worker and his work is dissolved. . . . This pure being (or less than being) is completely unrelated to us."<sup>9</sup> This dualism is cemented through the divine predicates of "impassability" and "eternity." In this way, God is not only contrasted to the world of "becoming and decay", "time and space" but also "locked in the be-

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<sup>4</sup> *Theology of the Apostles*, 132; *History of the Christ*, 306 (in above order). For the following see also Neuer, *Zusammenhang*, 55-64; Walldorf, *Realistische Philosophie*, 188-93.

<sup>5</sup> See *Dogma*, 30-31; *Gründe*, 38-39; *Metaphysik*, 66-67.

<sup>6</sup> "Glaube und Geschichte," 345.

<sup>7</sup> *Selbstdarstellungen*, 162.

<sup>8</sup> *Dogma*, 30.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

yond [*Jenseits*]."<sup>10</sup> God's transcendence undermines his active involvement with creation. An impersonal notion of God leaves us with abstract hypostases such as "a substance that is nothing but subsistent; a force that is nothing but causal capacity; a thinking that is nothing but thinking."<sup>11</sup> The problem, in other words, is an inner-divine one: God's transcendence and his creative agency seem to cancel each other out. An increase in transcendence automatically gives rise to a decrease in creative involvement and vice versa.<sup>12</sup>

## ii. Divine omnipotence and divine creative action

In connection with what has just been said stands another critical point which Schlatter brings to our attention: the relation between God's omnipotence and creative agency. The passages in which Schlatter explicitly uses the term "omnipotence" (*Allmacht*) are rare.<sup>13</sup> In our study thus far the concept of divine omnipotence came most clearly to the fore in Schlatter's notion of *creatio ex nihilo*. Schlatter speaks of God's "complete causality" in order to express the idea that God – out of nothing – brings man into being, who is other than God himself, namely creature and not creator. In this context, however, Schlatter calls attention to an inherent self-contradiction that emerges when God's creative action is understood in terms of sheer causal power and abstract omnipotence.

If we conceive of God's power as being effective in the form of a natural force, that means as instituting merely dependence, then God is conceived of as egoist. Through this, however, the ground of creation is negated. He [God] affirms, asserts, and actuates himself. Thereby, no room emerges for a second will, no sphere of action emerges in which an 'I' given to itself [*ein sich selbst geschenktes Ich*] could be in charge.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> "Glaube und Geschichte," 345-46.

<sup>11</sup> *Dogma*, 31.

<sup>12</sup> For an elucidative exposition of these issues see Kathryn Tanner, *God and Creation*, 38-48: "In the cosmologies of the Hellenistic era, which were formed through the confluence of Platonic and Aristotelian categories, the transcendence and direct involvement of God with the non-divine appear to be mutually exclusive, to vary inversely in degree" (p. 38-39).

<sup>13</sup> See e.g. *Romans*, 226; "Unterwerfung," 8; "Wort und Schrift," 32; "Wunder," 832; \**Wesen und Quellen*, 87.

<sup>14</sup> \**Dogmatik I*, 140.

Schlatter is aware of the problems that arise when God's action is understood in contrast to human action. The positive intention behind such an understanding is to secure the divine transcendence, sovereignty and freedom in talk about divine agency. Yet precisely this securing is not achieved because a contrast locates both God and man within the same frame of reference, on the same level, albeit in negative terms.<sup>15</sup> Under these circumstances God's agency has to compete with human agency. God's omnipotence – and thus his being-God – seems to be in danger from the human capacity for free and self-determined action.<sup>16</sup> As a consequence, divine agency is understood in terms of unlimited and arbitrary power which God exercises in order to overcome human agency. Schlatter remarks that "force turns into violence [*Gewalt*] when the activity of the one extinguishes the activity of the other."<sup>17</sup> Applied to God's agency this means that divine action becomes "an absorbing activity which does not allow for anything to emerge except its own action." In this way, as Schlatter puts it, God's action "is made contemptuous, like any other tyranny." It achieves nothing but

the emptying of everything else into apparition and nothingness. Such an idea of power will always turn into impersonal concepts about the world cause [*Weltgrund*] and thin down to the primordial substance [*Urstoff*], or primordial force [*Urkraft*], or primordial idea [*Uridee*] the work of which consists in self-preservation.<sup>18</sup>

The critical point addressed here is, first of all, an inner-divine problem. If God's creative action is presented as the power that limits, overcomes and finally absorbs creation and its agency, then the divine power is indeed all there is, namely omnipotence. Yet Schlatter argues that causality requires the other as the recipient of the effect. Relation and community are therefore prerequisites for causal action.<sup>19</sup> Without them the causal process disinte-

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<sup>15</sup> The problem is aptly summarised in Tanner, *God and Creation*, 46.

<sup>16</sup> See *Dogma*, 155.

<sup>17</sup> *Metaphysik*, 54.

<sup>18</sup> *Dogma*, 155.

<sup>19</sup> See *Metaphysik*, 52.

grates into monism: "The process moves only in the one direction from the cause to its effect so that the terms 'interaction' [*Verkehr*] and 'community' are no longer applicable to the relation of that which has been caused [*des Gewirkten*] to the causing force."<sup>20</sup>

Within the concept of divine creative agency just outlined, the category of omnipotence, which was originally employed to uphold God's transcendence and supremacy, brings God's action down to the same level as human action. Moreover, the above understanding of omnipotence makes the same redundant since it annihilates – or at least cuts the relation to – the other so that there is nothing left upon which God could exercise his power.

This paradox becomes especially acute in connection with God's act of creation. The above notion of divine omnipotence makes it impossible for God to create, that is, to bring into being anything other than himself, not to mention a personal other invested with free and self-determined causality.<sup>21</sup> To use Schlatter's terminology, the divine act of creation can never be completed because God's omnipotence collapses and amalgamates that which it brings forth, into God. What comes about is not creature but something like an extension or emanation of the Creator. As Schlatter argues in the passage quoted above, "no room emerges for a second will, no sphere of action emerges in which an 'I' could be in charge." Thus, the concept of God's act of creation collapses under the pressure of the very categories which were originally employed to express God's power, sovereignty and otherness in the divine act of creation.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> *Philosophische Arbeit*, 280; similarly in *Metaphysik*, 54-55.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Schwöbel who argues that "the traditional interpretation of God's metaphysical attributes" tends "to stress divine transcendence to such an extent that God can no longer be understood as the creative ground of the being of the world" (*God: Action and Revelation*, 59).

<sup>22</sup> We may say that the paradox of omnipotence assumes an ontological character and ultimately becomes an inner-divine paradox. For this see also Trappe, *Allmacht und Selbstbeschränkung Gottes*, 11-15.

### iii. Divine being and action over against human being and action

Besides the inner-divine problem just sketched out, Schlatter regards the way in which divine being and action is related to human being and action as highly problematic. At the heart of the matter lies the monistic drive that came to the surface in the concept of divine agency with which Schlatter is dealing critically. God acts in such a way that authentic creaturely being and action is made impossible or absorbed through the divine agency. Throughout his work we see Schlatter resolutely pinpointing and fighting monistic tendencies which, as he argues, arise when divine action is understood to work in the form of a natural force.<sup>23</sup> Some examples may suffice to illustrate this:

A concept of faith, for example, according to which the relationship with God comes about through "removing man from God's revelation and government" is, in Schlatter's view, a self-contradiction.

For faith is only a possibility *if everything else is not eclipsed by God's light* – but man begins to shine. Faith is possible only *if man is not rendered speechless by God's speech* but begins to speak himself and learns to think and speak in God's service. Faith is possible only *if God's revelation does not result in God's solitude, so that he has no space for anyone but himself* – but man is transferred into aliveness and activity, both of which God grants to him. If God's revelation were delivered in any other manner then we could not have faith in him; we could not lay hold of God's grace as the foundation out of which our life arises (emphasis A. L.).<sup>24</sup>

Schlatter is very clear about faith as God's sovereign act of creation. "How could it come to an affirmation of God in us, which grants us a valid personal relationship with him, in any other way than through God's almighty creative grace?"<sup>25</sup> However, this is also true:

If God's creative acting burst into us like a bomb from above, then it destroys everything we are, tears apart every continuity of our life and history, and, consequently, extinguishes any thinking from our

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<sup>23</sup> In addition to the passages quoted in the foregoing section, see Schlatter's *Dienst* where he critically deals with a notion of divine agency through which man is merely made passive (especially 41, 46-47, 53-55, 77-79) and "Noch ein Wort" (105-08). Similarly in *Theology of the Apostles*, where Schlatter critiques enthusiastic forms of piety which limit "the concept of God to the notion of power" and reduce faith to "the passive anticipation of a divine operation" after which "a lofty sense of union with the deity" might be attained (369-72). See further *Ethik*, 38-39; *Dogma*, 29-38, 123, 155-56, 175; *Erlebtes*, 75.

<sup>24</sup> *Dogma*, 366-67. Cf. *ibid.*, 155 where Schlatter, in a similar fashion, relates the form of divine action to the possibility of trust in and worship of God.

<sup>25</sup> *Sprechstunde*, 9.

faith. Through this, however, the word 'faith' loses any conceivable sense. . . . The ground and content of faith no longer exists when the given existence [*Bestand*] of our life is destroyed by the miracle through which faith is created.<sup>26</sup>

Schlatter's discussion of the relation of the divine Word and human speech, serves as another illustration. With direct reference to Friedrich Gogarten as one of the exponents of early Dialectical Theology, Schlatter welcomes the attempt to rehabilitate and give absolute primacy to Scripture in the life and worship of the church. However, he is critical of the way in which the action of the divine Word and Spirit is portrayed in this connection:

What is the goal and the effect of the divine speech? In Gogarten, man is rendered dumb when God speaks. What is the effect and the goal of the divine Spirit? In Gogarten, the human spirit is extinguished when the divine Spirit shines. For us, then, there is only the service [*Gottesdienst*] of silence and every sermon is sin. For there is no such sermon in which I, the speaking one, do not speak.<sup>27</sup>

Schlatter locates the basis for such more or less monistic notions of God's action in an antithetical understanding of the relation between God and creation. The operating principle is a "pre-Christian form of thinking which thought of God and humanity as enemies."<sup>28</sup> The relation of divine and human agency is viewed – parallel to the relation of divine transcendence and creative involvement – as one of inverse variation. An increase in divine action logically triggers a decrease in human action and vice versa. This dualism – be it a dualism from below or above – always tends to collapse into a monism in which the one agency is conceived of as the annihilation of the other. Schlatter summarises these thoughts in his discussion of the relation of God and history.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 13-14.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 66-67.

<sup>28</sup> *Dogma*, 365. See also *Sprechstunde*, 66-67. This is also the nexus in which Schlatter critically engages with the early theology of Karl Barth. In his review of the second edition of Barth's commentary on Romans, Schlatter writes: "Barth's God is 'the Other,' who is other than we are and other than the world is. From this arises the powerful No which he places over against the entire state of the world, including the highest and purest in human life. All that we are, possess, and achieve is therefore judged, for it is not God, not divine, and therefore stands under the law of condemnation and negation. In Paul, too, every refusal to honor God falls under absolute condemnation, and he sees in every religious attempt which places man beside God and makes God dependent on human resolution and on human activity, on our willing and working, the perversion of religion. But that is not all Paul has to say about God, not the statement which he places in our souls, at Jesus' instruction, with praise of the righteousness and grace of God. For this reverts to the pre-Christian state of the knowledge of God, since it is the relationship of the unreconciled man to God" ("Barth's Romans," 123-24).

Finally, behind a negative judgment about history there stands the awareness of an unresolved opposition between man and God, and so a pre-Christian idea of God. People are afraid of God's act, as though it threatened the reality of human life. So they try to protect this reality by denying the act of God. They think that when God acts, he annihilates everything that exists beside himself. This all-absorbing God, who will tolerate no world beside himself, and who must be denied for the sake of the world's existence, is not the God of Scripture. This is how man, oppressed by the sense of God's having left him, conceives him.<sup>29</sup>

## **B. Conclusion: Two desiderata for a theory of divine action**

Our exposition of Schlatter's awareness concerning possible problematic aspects of a theory of divine action allows us – in a roundabout way – to articulate two interconnected desiderata for a theory of divine action. These desiderata will sharpen our perception of Schlatter's own approach and lead us to some of its distinctive characteristics.

### **i. Concerning the inner-divine paradox**

We may say that a theory of divine action should obviate the clash between the different aspects of God's agency. If, for example, the aspect of God's transcendence and sovereignty is played out against the aspect of God's creative interaction and interrelation with creation, the whole concept of divine action is in danger of collapsing. What seems desirable is to relate the different facets of divine agency in such a way that their distinctness does not undermine the unity of God's action and vice versa. The promise of such an approach is that it prevents our theological thinking from the predominance of categories under the conceptual pressure of which we are left with a truncated picture of divine agency.

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<sup>29</sup> "Theology of the New Testament and Dogmatics," 199. For an apt summary of the problem see Wilfried Härle, "Werk Gottes – Werk des Menschen," 213-16.

ii. Concerning the dualism of God and creation

A theory of divine action must not operate on the basis of an *a priori* dualism of God and creation. An understanding of God's being and action, which is developed in antithesis to God's creation, leads all too easily to a theo-monistic understanding of divine action. However, without giving due weight to creaturely being and causal power, a concept of divine agency makes itself superfluous because agency requires the relation to the other as the recipient of the effect. It is therefore desirable that in a theory of divine action God and creation are related in such a way that space is given to both so that creator and creature can be viewed as agents in propriety to their respective and distinct being.<sup>30</sup>

## 2. Towards a Multi-Dimensional Understanding of Divine Action

We have already suggested that Schlatter's understanding of divine agency is based on categories which reach deeper than the differentiation of the single acts that constitute God's *Heilsgeschichte*. In the following we shall take a first step to bring these categories to light by outlining Schlatter's conception of different dimensions or facets which together constitute divine action.

### A. The transcendental and the immanent dimension of divine action

i. Transcendental action

The term "transcendental action" refers to Schlatter's idea that God acts in a sovereign, absolute, and one-sided manner as the one who is superior to man. The most obvious and prominent locus of this dimension is God's creation out of nothing by which he calls crea-

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<sup>30</sup> For a similar formulation of this desideratum see Gunton, "God, Grace and Freedom," 133.



tion into being. He does not need anything other than himself in order to act upon the creature, for which reason his action is immediate action (*actio immediata*).

The world came about through the divine creating, and this is something completely different from our human ability and, hence, remains completely incomprehensible to us. The beginning of this world is, because it is creation, a miracle, and this requires of us the submission that calms us and bridle our thinking.<sup>31</sup>

In this Schlatter clarifies the "*differentia specifica*" between divine and human action. "Only He acts creatively, upon us and in us."<sup>32</sup> Throughout his work Schlatter articulates this aspect of God's agency by using different terms such as "the full majesty of divine acting which is creatively supreme to man and nature,"<sup>33</sup> or God's "complete causality" in which God's power to act is one with his Word and will.<sup>34</sup> In the centre of Schlatter's terminology stands his speech about the "creative act" which he defines as follows: "An activity [*Wirken*] proves to be creative when it possesses totality, that means when it unites willing and acting, word and power. It is therefore superior to space and time and to the obstructions which both bring upon acting."<sup>35</sup>

It would be a serious misunderstanding of Schlatter's thought to think that he ascribes the transcendental dimension only to God's creative action at the beginning of the world. The numerous references in which Schlatter speaks of a creative act of God appear in a variety of actional contexts.<sup>36</sup> Thus, we have seen the transcendental moment of divine action in Schlatter's concept of God's providence. It is precisely because of God's otherness, sovereignty and faithfulness, in which he stands beyond the creature, that God actively and creatively upholds and enables creaturely life – even that of sinful man. We made the same

<sup>31</sup> *Andachten*, 381.

<sup>32</sup> "Unterwerfung," 8. The whole section is important in this context. See also *\*Kritische Bemerkungen*, 7

<sup>33</sup> *Jesus und Paulus*, 105; cf. "Unterwerfung," 8; *Furcht vor dem Denken*, 12.

<sup>34</sup> See especially *Dogma*, 36, 123; "Jesus und wir heutigen Menschen," 209; "Wunder der Bibel," 72; *\*Dogmatik I*, 195.

<sup>35</sup> *Dogma*, 58.

<sup>36</sup> See e.g. the references above, p. 20 n. 30.

observation with regard to God's realisation of salvation through Jesus Christ. Schlatter remarks: "The death of Jesus is an act of God's grace, therefore efficaciously working with creative force, instituting something new which would not exist without the same [the death of Jesus].<sup>37</sup> The most straightforward examples in this connection are those in which Schlatter outlines a work of God as a new creation.

God presents us with his gifts through the one who is risen from the dead. Therefore, we are 'a new creation' – no longer merely what the first creation made of us; no longer that which nature already grants us. Paul orders his relations to all people according to this insight – to the Jews, the Greeks and the Christians. Now 'he no longer knows anybody according to the manner of the flesh,' nobody in the way we know each other through the natural media . . .<sup>38</sup>

Especially in the light of this last citation in which Schlatter correlates Christ's resurrection from the dead and the radical newness of the Christian life, Schlatter's idea of the new creation must be understood in terms of a *creatio ex nihilo*. With direct recourse to the first creation Schlatter articulates regeneration as "the work and gift of Jesus [that] lies completely beyond nature and is *a new work of God which is as creative as the one through which the world and the flesh came into being*" (emphasis A. L.).<sup>39</sup> In the same way, God's eschatological action, by which he will establish his eternal kingdom, is a sovereign and exclusive act of God: "God's kingdom is not a repetition of creation but a new creation – because in Jesus the Word, which God has spoken to us, has entered into the world."<sup>40</sup>

We see that the transcendental dimension of divine action is a constitutive part of the operational analogy through which Schlatter links *creatio originalis* with any *creatio nova*.<sup>41</sup> Schlatter's intention is to highlight the actuality of God's creative agency in the here and now. "[W]e have the actuality [*Wirklichkeit*] of God before us – a revealed God, a God

<sup>37</sup> \**Christologie*, fragments. See also *Briefe*, 38.

<sup>38</sup> "Jesus und wir heutigen Menschen," 214; similarly in *Dogma*, 279; *Wir Christen und die Juden*, 14; *Johannes*, 18; \**Schöpfung und Offenbarung*, 13.

<sup>39</sup> *Johannes*, 21.

<sup>40</sup> \**Schöpfung und Offenbarung*, 13; similarly in *Dogma*, 534-35, 538; *Opfer*, 48; "Letzte Bitte Jesu," 335.

<sup>41</sup> We touched this operational analogy above, p. 41.

who does not remain silent but speaks; who is not inactive but works; who did not merely speak in former times but who is *as alive today as on the first day of creation*" (emphasis A. L.).<sup>42</sup>

ii. Immanent action

The second dimension underlying Schlatter's concept of divine agency may be articulated as immanent action, which takes the specific form of enabling or bestowing action. God interacts with his creation in such a way as to be appropriate to the being and nature of the different creatures. Creation in its otherness vis-à-vis God constitutes the antecedent conditions for divine agency. It is *this* creation which God sustains and enables to be itself and to become what he intends it to be. We saw this dimension of divine agency most clearly displayed in Schlatter's view of divine providential action. Yet, also in our outline of Schlatter's understanding of the creation of man we came across the idea that God not only creates immediately but also mediately. He creates man through nature and fellow man. This efficaciousness of the human and the non-human creature is, as we explored in our discussion of Schlatter's idea of *concursum divinum*, grounded in God's enabling and bestowing action. Even God's sovereign activity by which he establishes salvific faith in Christ contains the enabling aspect of divine action. God, through his Holy Spirit, enables man to respond to, and appropriate, Christ's work of salvation in a way that befits the personal nature of human being. A further case in point is the new man whom God calls into being through a creative act. Yet this action is, at the same time, the enabling of the old creation so that human being is fully realised and completed according to God's purposes. Thus, with regard to human personhood Schlatter states:

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<sup>42</sup> "Unterwerfung," 48; similarly in *Johannes*, 21.

Since, however, the divine acting [*Wirken*] nowhere destroys nature, we cannot expect such an effect [*Wirkung*] from the Holy Spirit. The efficacy [*Wirksamkeit*] of the Holy Spirit seizes our personal life in its unity. It does not cut off our natural functions; it does not replace them. Rather, *the full range of our natural vivacity is preserved, wanted and used by the Spirit. His gift does not replace the psychical processes but produces them* (emphasis A. L.).<sup>43</sup>

Along similar lines Schlatter argues that the "ultimate and highest goal" of God's grace, namely the creation of "the new heaven and the new earth" is neither "the end of the world" [*Weltuntergang*] nor "the destruction of nature." Rather, it is an act in which God works the "transfiguration and glorification of nature."<sup>44</sup>

## **B. The interplay of the different dimensions of divine action**

The material just explored suggests that the transcendental and immanent dimension of God's agency are the two categories on the basis of which Schlatter understands the manifold actions of God. What adds to this assumption is that Schlatter seemingly does not simply identify one of these dimensions with certain divine actions. Rather, he locates the transcendental and the immanent aspect in one and the same act. We shall now present two cases which are particularly suited for corroborating this assumption.

### **i. The creation of the world**

We have already mentioned that, in Schlatter's view, God creates man not only directly but also indirectly, by enabling personal and impersonal fellow-creatures to interact efficaciously with man. We have also noted that the transition from God's creative action to God's providential action is fluid in this connection. However, it is not the case that the close link between transcendental action and immanent action be explained by ascribing the former to creation and the latter to providence. Rather, both aspects mark each divine

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<sup>43</sup> *Dogma*, 348.

<sup>44</sup> "Wunder der Bibel," 79. Similarly in *Dogma*, 535.

action. Schlatter makes this clear in his unpublished lecture on Genesis. He remarks that the first verse of Genesis, which includes the Hebrew term *bara*, stands as a summary of God's creative activity which is then unfolded in the following verses.<sup>45</sup> The term *bara* can stand for different facets of God's action. First, God brings forth the world immediately. "In our verse [Gen 1:1], however, the *bara* is conceived in absolute terms [*schlechthin absolut gedacht*] as – to use the old terminology – *creatio ex nihilo*. This does not result from the word itself, but from the fact that God *bara* through his command-word into the empty darkness."<sup>46</sup> Besides this *creatio immediata*, Schlatter also recognises a *creatio mediata*. "[T]he word [*bara*] is not limited to the *creatio ex nihilo* in the strict sense. Any divine acting can be called *bara*, even when it is the transformation . . . of something that already exists."<sup>47</sup> Thus, Schlatter remarks that man was not created in the same way as the earth was, namely *ex nihilo*.<sup>48</sup> This applies also to the land animals:

The land animals arise from the earth. However, besides the *tozeh haaraz* (verse 24) pay attention to the *wajaas elohim* (verse 25). When the earth appears as the immediate producer of the land animals, then, according to the thought of the text, God is nonetheless the one who makes them. The secondary activity of the earth is completely enclosed in the divine acting.<sup>49</sup>

The newness of this *creatio mediata*, which is intrinsic to every act of creation, consists in that God empowers creation to bring forth something which it could have never generated out of itself. God enables creation to become what he intends it to be.<sup>50</sup> Through this Schlatter pinpoints the interrelation between God's transcendental action and immanent ac-

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<sup>45</sup> \*Genesis, 14.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 15; cf. Jesu Gottheit, 64: ". . . the majesty which calls that which is not [*das nicht Seiende*] in order that it be."

<sup>47</sup> \*Genesis, 14-15.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 37. For a similar interpretation of the term "*bara*" see Ganoczy, *Der dreieinige Schöpfer*, 193-96.

<sup>50</sup> Gunton, in similarity to Schlatter's approach, expresses the mediatorial dimension of God's creative activity when he says "that part of the divine engagement with creation in Genesis 1 involves the ministerial use of parts of the created order in the forming of others. When God says 'Let the earth bring forth' we have a picture of divine action enabling the world itself to take shape in the way the sovereign creator intends" (*The Triune Creator*, 63; the whole chapter 3, pp. 41-64, is illuminating in this context).

tion as the two constitutive dimensions of the one divine act of creation. Schlatter makes this clear in his discussion of evolution:

The idea of creation leaves therefore full space for the investigation that traces the connections between the new and the already-earlier existing organisms. The text itself accentuates such a *co-operation of the existing nature in the new works of creation* at different points in a simple manner, *without being afraid that it could thereby compromise the idea of creation*. The land animals are no less God's work than the water-animals when the earth produces the former out of itself (emphasis A. L.).<sup>51</sup>

As we have seen in the section on *concursus divinus*, evolution is by no means a process inherent in creation itself. Creation does not effect its own progress. Rather, that which is new over against the already-existing creation comes about because God acts in a new and creative way. Schlatter uses the idea of history to articulate this concept. "There was a time when man was not; now he is. Therefore, nature has a history. History, however, comes about through action, and the action which founds and sets that which is new is will."<sup>52</sup> We observe that the idea of different actional dimensions enables Schlatter to understand divine action as history: "The divine will and acting does not exhaust itself in its first act. Rather, the latter has only the character of a beginning. Divine creative activity moves on. Superior formations follow lower formations."<sup>53</sup>

## ii. The inspiration of the divine word<sup>54</sup>

In Schlatter the ministry of the prophets and apostles, who receive and proclaim the word of God, is grounded in the mediating work of the Holy Spirit: "Just as every personal

<sup>51</sup> \**Genesis*, 52-53. For the discussion of evolution see further *Dogma*, 45-47; idem, *Gründe*, 55-56.

<sup>52</sup> \**Wesen und Quellen*, 76. The whole section (pp. 76-78) is important in this context.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 107. The point to be noted here is that Schlatter's concept entails a teleological understanding of creation's goodness and perfection. God does not create this world instantaneously but in such a way that further creative action is required in order to enable creation to become what God intends it to be. Gunton expresses this intentional and teleological aspect of God's work of creation through the notion of "creation as project" which includes the differentiation between relative and absolute perfection (see *The Triune Creator*, 12, 55-56, 86-89, 93, 164-65).

<sup>54</sup> For a brief introduction to Schlatter's scriptology see Walldorf's essay "Inspiration und Geschichte." Bailer's exposition in *Prinzip*, 77-81 is also illuminating for our discussion here.

relationship with God is mediated through the Holy Spirit, so the apostolic and prophetic task has its basis in the fact that the Spirit of God imparted to those who are called their capacity to think, will and act."<sup>55</sup> The inspiration of the divine word is the "inner work of God in the prophet" which takes place through the Holy Spirit.<sup>56</sup> The pneumatological process between the giver and the recipient of the divine word is marked by two different aspects. First, Schlatter specifies the divine inspiration as a sovereign creative act:

The event of inspiration is a creative giving of God, and is thus an absolute act which does not allow itself to be measured by degrees. No matter whether little or much is given, God is the giver. Synergistic interpretations are not of any use here because the activity of God does not stand beside the human activity, but rather over and before it and is its cause, out of which it arises.<sup>57</sup>

What happens here is "that God, according to his sovereign choice, places single persons [*Persönlichkeiten*] in a unique relationship to himself. He does so as the Spirit who, in giving truth, command and power, works in them [the persons], and this not sporadically, here and there, but in a coherent and progressing history."<sup>58</sup> Inspiration thus means a divine intervention that stands in radical discontinuity to the personal, natural and historical existence of the one inspired. Schlatter underlines:

Where God is revealed, there he reveals himself. He himself has awakened and formed his messengers for himself, has filled their hearts with his word, and has illuminated their sense with his light so that his own word is in their mouth and proclaimed through their service. The Spirit is the manner in which God is internally present in a man, moving him and speaking to him so that he makes man speak what is God's [*was Gottes ist*]. As certainly as Scripture comes from God, as certainly it stems from God's Spirit.<sup>59</sup>

The Holy Spirit creates something utterly new which is without any analogy in the creaturely world of man. "That which comes from the Spirit does not stem from us."<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> *Dogma*, 364. See the whole section entitled a. The Origins of the Scriptures from the Spirit (*ibid.*, 364-69); *Einleitung*, 479.

<sup>56</sup> See *\*Wesen und Quellen*, 142.

<sup>57</sup> *Dogma*, 371. For the inspiration of the prophets and the apostles see *ibid.*, 358-64; *\*Wesen und Quellen*, 142-44.

<sup>58</sup> *\*Wesen und Quellen*, 144.

<sup>59</sup> *Einleitung*, 479.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 480.

Schlatter outlines the *novum* of divine inspiration when he explores the unique relationship between God and prophet: "But here [when God speaks and reveals himself] we find processes which we must call an *immediate perception of God*, a hearing of God that is sometimes accompanied by the analogue of seeing (Is 6:1)" (emphasis A. L.).<sup>61</sup> The event of inspiration is a creative acting of God upon man in the Holy Spirit. It means a radical break, a rupture in which the life of the person inspired is defined in a new way. God selects, calls and empowers certain persons to receive and to proclaim the divine word. The Holy Spirit seizes man and puts him at God's disposal. Schlatter summarises: "Those who receive a divine calling receive a new gift which places them above the community prior to and after them. A creative act of God equips them."<sup>62</sup>

The transition between the first and the second moment of the inspiring action of the Holy Spirit can be demonstrated on the basis of Schlatter's critical discussion of orthodox scriptology. He argues that the Ancient Church developed its doctrine of inspiration exclusively in terms of divine power, sovereignty and absoluteness. Schlatter affirms the positive intention behind this emphasis, namely to underline God's holiness and superiority over against man and thus to secure the divinity of Scripture. Through this the Ancient Church wanted to guide the reader of the Bible to focus solely on God – to hear, know and obey God.<sup>63</sup> However, according to Schlatter, these ideas gave rise to a highly questionable notion of the work of the Holy Spirit in the event of inspiration:

Therefore, the Spirit, since he is holy and God's [Spirit], becomes the destroyer of what is human. The activity of the Spirit requires the passivity of the one who is inspired; his own consciousness is submerged and his own will is silenced, he is moved as the harp is by the player or as the pen is moved by

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<sup>61</sup> \**Wesen und Quellen*, 143. This is, as far as we know, the only place where Schlatter talks about an *immediate* perception of God.

<sup>62</sup> *Dogma*, 378.

<sup>63</sup> See *Dogma*, 366-67; *Einleitung*, 478-79.



the writer. Understood this way, the act of inspiration is an isolated experience that simply inserts itself into the other mental processes. The unity of the life-act is broken by the event of inspiration.<sup>64</sup>

Schlatter calls attention to the tacit theo-monism underlying this concept of inspiration and the resulting scriptology. "Indeed, in the church one has often tried to erase man in the Bible in order that God appears in it."<sup>65</sup> The reality and truth of the divine work are established at the cost of the reality of the human creature. Man is reduced to a mere instrument, an inanimate tool in God's hands. "The divine acting presents itself as the nullification of the human acting; the truth of the inspiration rests upon the fact that it puts man into passivity and silences him."<sup>66</sup> The creature is collapsed into God and thus ceases to be itself. Schlatter critiques: "[T]he old doctrine of inspiration monophysitically used a concept of God according to which the human act is absorbed by the divine activity . . . ."<sup>67</sup>

Schlatter attempts a solution of the problems just indicated by unfolding the second aspect of the inspiring action of the Holy Spirit. In the event of inspiration the Holy Spirit neither destroys, nor circumvents, nor disregards, human creatureliness. Rather, the Spirit is creative in the fullest sense of the word.

God's Spirit does not destroy, but creates. He is the generator of the true knowledge, which is conscious of itself, and of the pure will, which has control over itself. *That which he [the Spirit] breaks is the sinful will and the dark thoughts which arise from false desires; however, he does not break the natural form of the soul but fills it with God's gifts and awakens and empowers it toward that which man cannot do out of himself. . . . [T]hat which comes from the Spirit does not stem from us. However, this does not mean that it remains far from and strange to us. It is not from us, but in us. Exactly because God joins men in the Spirit, his gifts are meant seriously, real gifts, which become their [men's] complete property that they have and possess as part of their own person. Therefore, God's messengers are not divested of their characteristic individuality through the work of the Spirit. Rather, the Spirit creates and perfects them and makes them people of one piece whose thought and will, word and work, originate from the same holy drive and who are pervaded with God's light and truth* (emphasis A. L.).<sup>68</sup>

<sup>64</sup> *Dogma*, 365. Similarly with regard to the rabbinic idea of inspiration in *Glaube*, 15, 50-51.

<sup>65</sup> *Einleitung*, 479.

<sup>66</sup> *Dienst*, 78.

<sup>67</sup> *Dogma*, 376-77.

<sup>68</sup> *Einleitung*, 480. See also "Theology of the New Testament and Dogmatics," 195. Schlatter's exemplification of this idea in the opening sentences of his essay "Evangelist Matthäus" is illuminating.

Schlatter understands the inspiring action of the Holy Spirit as "grace," as divine "giving" which enables man "to see, know, speak and act."<sup>69</sup> The Spirit acts in such a way as to preserve – moreover, enable and perfect, human being and action in all their personal, corporeal and socio-historical particularity.

It is through the history in which the men of the Bible stand that they are the recipients of the Spirit. The inspiration of the Apostles is grounded in their mission [*Sendung*] through Christ and arises out of this history. In a roundabout way, the Spirit leads them into history, not out of it, because he does not work the emptying [*Entleerung*] and thwarting [*Unterbindung*] of the human life, but brings forth people whose thought and will stem from God because they think what God thinks and will what God wills. Therefore, he [the Spirit] creates history, that is, correlation and conditionality of the one through the other, their unification into a community in which the many are placed into a traditional chain [*Traditionskette*] with and after each other and are formed through the joint life [*Gesamtleben*]. This does not entail a degradation [*Verminderung*] of their [the people's] spiritual nature and force but is precisely that which the Spirit wills and works. For this reason, the effective power of Scripture consists in that, in the same way as it stems from history, it also creates history and joins the course of our thinking and willing with what has happened in the past so that our own life receives its foundation and content from it.<sup>70</sup>

On the grounds of such an understanding of the action of the Holy Spirit, Schlatter cannot conceive of the Spirit's inspiring and revealing action, and history in antithetical terms. He emphatically underlines that the Spirit must not be denied for the sake of history or vice versa. "Rather, true *Pneumatik* and true *Historik* are indissolubly connected with each other."<sup>71</sup> With regard to the persons inspired Schlatter puts it as follows:

Their consciousness stands in unity with what precedes them and exists around them. Here belongs, for example, concerning the prophets, not only their picture of nature and the historical tradition that they have about the ages ago, but also a significant part of those imaginations by means of which they describe the final aim of God from the perspective of the present. These connections, which link the bearer of the divine word with his time, are not torn apart through the activity of the Holy Spirit but rather instituted. For they are indispensable to him [the prophet] since through them the community comes about which connects God's messenger with those who are to hear him.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>69</sup> *Dienst*, 78.

<sup>70</sup> *Dogma*, 367-68. The translation of this passage is, indeed, very difficult. Nevertheless, Dintaman's translation is seriously distorted (see *Creative Grace*, 169).

<sup>71</sup> *Dogma*, 367. See also Bockmühl, "Wahrnehmung," 105-06. It is only consequent that Schlatter rejects an unhistorical conception of Scripture: "[F]or the Bible does not lead us out of the sacred history, but into it. It is not a substitute for, but part of, the same [sacred history]. Its becoming belongs itself to those deeds of God which have their root in his holy and gracious will" ("Heilige Geschichte," 224).

<sup>72</sup> *Dogma*, 378. It is obvious that such a conception has direct ramifications for Schlatter's view on the infallibility of Scripture. The idea of infallibility is a "postulate" that "invents a revelation in which God is unveiled remote and separate from man. God has not given a revelation to us in which man disappears. This is because of the riches of his grace, not out of weakness, but for the sake of his glorification. For God's glory is not that he gives us the proof of being able to compose an infallible book, but that he unites men with himself

In sum: one of the central thoughts of Schlatter's doctrine of inspiration and of Scripture is that the Holy Spirit, in his creative activity, enables persons to receive and to proclaim the word of God in such a way as to be appropriate to their being and nature. "For God, that which is human is not merely the patiently endured burden, not merely the impeding barrier which for the moment will not yet be abolished. Rather, man, including his weakness, is valued, willed and loved by God."<sup>73</sup>

### C. God acts upon, with and through the creature

So far we have met two different dimensions of divine agency in Schlatter's concept. However, when we recapitulate Schlatter's exposition of the creation account in Genesis we can see that his *explicit* reference to the creation of the earth, man and land animals carries an *implicit* reference to three dimensions of divine action. First, God acts alone in a transcendental and sovereign manner. He calls the earth into being through his creative word. Second, God employs the soil of the earth. He actively forms man as something new out of already-existing material. Third, God and creation come even closer when the former takes the earth as medium to bring forth the land animals.<sup>74</sup>

We encountered a similar structure in Schlatter's understanding of God's saving agency. The salvation of man is an absolute and transcendent act of God. At the same time it is realised through Jesus Christ, that is, within the created reality of this world, so that man is confronted with the divine reality in a way as to be adequate to his creaturely and personal nature. But this is not enough. The sinfulness of man requires an act of God that

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in such a way that they, as men, speak his word" (*Dogma*, 375). See also Walldorf, "Inspiration und Geschichte," 72-76.

<sup>73</sup> *Dogma*, 377.

<sup>74</sup> For an illuminating exposition of these three facets see Francis Watson: *Text, Church and World*, 140-45; Gunton, *The Triune Creator*, 61-64.

takes place in man, enabling the same to appropriate God's salvation personally. This divine acting happens through the Holy Spirit.<sup>75</sup>

This concept of three dimensions of divine action, which is only latent in Schlatter's lecture on Genesis and subliminally underlies his understanding of salvation, becomes explicit in some of his published works. Based on his assignment of human passivity and activity in the act of thinking, Schlatter expounds:

In this we perceive again the *threefold relation* in which God places himself in relation to us, *working through us, with us and in us*. For in the act of knowing we pass through three levels. The first one remains beyond our perception – we are made in such a way that we cannot observe ourselves in this [being created]. We never see how consciousness comes about. We are thus primarily made purely passive, and, therefore, before everything conscious stands something unconscious, something unknowable out of which our conscious forming arises. On the second level, we ourselves participate in our being-formed [*Gestaltetwerden*] in that we perceive what is given to us, since it is unveiled to us as our possession. These are the processes of conscious perception [*des bewußten Vernehmens*] through which we receive something that is seen and thought. The third level is that we ourselves form what has been received and give it existence and effectiveness in us through the capacity we have received. Now we think in ourselves what God shows us, and know in ourselves what God tells us (emphasis A. L.).<sup>76</sup>

In the respective end note, Schlatter refers to another passage in which he also articulates God's agency in terms of a threefold dimensionality.

Even through the course of our personal life there arise differences which define God's relation to us differently. We are, wherever we turn our will, open to God's effectivity. It goes *through us* because for him we are constantly penetrable. This is the untearable bond through which everything created clings to the Creator. However, God still places himself into another relation to us through the fact that a consciousness of God and, thereby, the ability to act for him is given to us. Now God is *with us*. And when we overcome the separateness from God, which is grounded in the false individual life [*falsche Eigenleben*], and reach the stage at which we are reconciled with God in that we make God's will our own will, then we are in God and God is *in us* (emphasis A. L.).<sup>77</sup>

Finally, in one of his books for daily devotions, Schlatter asserts the three facets of God's action on the level of human creatureliness. With reference to Acts 17:28 ("For in him we live and move and have our being") Schlatter unfolds the "three aspects of life,

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<sup>75</sup> For the first time we have reached the point in our study at which the different modes of divine action are linked with the respective person of the Trinity. However, further information is required before we can actually engage in a detailed examination of this issue.

<sup>76</sup> *Dogma*, 94.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 37-38.

movement and existence as that which man has, only because he is dependent on God."<sup>78</sup> Existence is "the first and simplest characteristic" and to be regarded as "a sign of our connectedness with God. For the real [*das Wirkliche*] comes about through the worker [*Wirker*] of all realities [*Wirklichkeiten*]." The second characteristic is the ability to move freely. Schlatter comments: "However, that their [the human persons'] existence becomes a continuous activity in free movement is something which they receive from God." Finally, the idea of movement is not sufficient to articulate fully what characterises man as God's work. "His [man's] movement arises out of that which he is inwardly. There he has a consciousness which shows him what he is and does, and there he has the will which makes his movements into acts. How could man be alive without God?"<sup>79</sup>

The *cantus firmus* of the passages just examined is the differentiation of three aspects of divine action. First, God's action is transcendental action. In a sovereign and one-sided act he creates something which would not be there without this action. We have met this idea throughout our study. Second, God acts within the created reality of this world. Here the divine action no longer originates outside of, and above, creation. Rather, God is with the creature and acts in its presence. This involvement of God leads to the idea of *actio mediata* because God takes creation as medium for further action within creation. In other words, he acts within creation in such a way as to be appropriate to creation. Third, the idea of God's active involvement is specified and taken a step further in the concept of divine action in the creature. Here, as we have seen, Schlatter uses the language of indwelling to communicate the idea that God's agency bestows, enables and empowers. God acts in the creature in such a way that divine action is not only located within the created sphere

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<sup>78</sup> *Andachten*, 417.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 418.

of this world but originates in and from the creature. Thus God acts from within, and through, the creature. Here the notion of *actio mediata* finds its fullest expression.

We have seen that Schlatter applies this concept of the three dimensions of divine action primarily to the human person as God's creature. He summarises his thoughts in the formula: God acts through, with and in man.<sup>80</sup> The difficulty with this formulation is that the preposition "through" is understood locally: the action "goes through us because for him [God] we are constantly penetrable."<sup>81</sup> Based on what has been said thus far, it appears to be more appropriate for us today to articulate the transcendental aspect of God's action by using the term "upon." The other two aspects are referred to as divine action "with" and "through" (instrumentally) man.

In conclusion: in the preceding sections we have elaborated that Schlatter's concept of divine agency rests on a two-dimensional understanding of action which we have called the transcendental and the immanent dimensions. We then saw that Schlatter implicitly, as well as explicitly, works with three different dimensions of divine agency. From an anthropological perspective this can be summarised by saying that God acts upon, with and through man. In Schlatter's understanding, these three dimensions (or facets) are the constitutive elements of a divine act. They function, therefore, as fundamental categories for his understanding of divine agency. To say that the three dimensions are of categorical charac-

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<sup>80</sup> This formula indicates the affinity of Schlatter's concept to the thought of the Catholic philosopher Franz von Baader. Schlatter himself quotes Baader in this connection: "God dwells through, with, and in the created" (*Dogma*, 559 n. 24). Kindt (*Gedanke der Einheit*, 88, 195) and Rieger (*Rechtfertigungslehre*, 46-47, 280) briefly mention the parallels between Baader and Schlatter. A look into Baader's works shows that he understands divine action as a) creative action which precedes creaturely action, b) as accompanying or assisting action, and c) as a force that offers itself to the creature. Baader often calls this "the ternar of instrumental acting [*werkzeugliches Wirken*], co-acting [*Mitwirken*], and mono- or self-acting [*Allein- oder Selbstwirken*]" (see *Sämtliche Werke*, I, 209-10). Accordingly, Baader describes man in his relationship to God as caused [*gewirkt*], co-working [*mitwirkend*], and mono-working [*alleinwirkend*] (see *ibid.*, II, 168; IV, 375; V, 68-69.; IX, 193; X, 135). This ternar is for Baader parallel with the ternar of God's dwelling through, with and in the creature (*ibid.*, VI, 326; cf. IV, 118-19).

<sup>81</sup> See the quotation above, p. 108 n. 77.

ter means that Schlatter is able to distinguish and, at the same, time link the three aspects of God's economy.<sup>82</sup>

### 3. Towards a Modal Theory of Divine Action

We begin to anticipate a possible solution for the problems indicated at the beginning of this chapter. The way in which Schlatter links and distinguishes the different dimensions of divine agency will eventually lead to a structural theory of divine action and result in a distinct understanding of the relation between God and man. However, the fact that God's agency is characterised by distinct yet interrelated dimensions is, as we shall work out, grounded in God's personal being of grace and love which determines the mode of divine action. It is to the way in which Schlatter qualifies divine action as personal action of grace and love that we now turn.

#### A. Personal action

##### i. Schlatter's call for a personal concept of divine action

The single reasons for Schlatter's critical stance towards concepts in which God's agency is understood as the exercise of absolute and arbitrary power working with the necessity and coercion of a natural force must not be repeated here. It suffices to recall that in Schlatter's view such concepts are incapable of capturing the biblical way in which God relates to man by acting upon, with and through the human person.

In Scripture, God – in order to act – neither destroys man nor sets him in the dark, so that his [God's] light may shine; less so do the people of Scripture dethrone God in order to be highly regarded themselves. Scripture is not the testimony of the eternal quarrel between God and us, in which the death of the one means the life of the other. Rather, Scripture shows us the God who makes people his image,

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<sup>82</sup> For a brief definition of a categorical distinction see Härle, *Dogmatik*, 74-75.

uses them as his instruments, and makes them his messengers so that they speak his word; moreover, he gives us his Son as the Word become flesh.<sup>83</sup>

Our exposition of Schlatter's thought should have made clear that he does not intend to remove the notion of power from his understanding of God's agency. The most obvious case in point is Schlatter's understanding of the transcendental dimension of divine agency. As he underlines, the Christian faith "affirms God's grace as power, and often it is the essential characteristic of the exercise of faith that it ascribes unity to God's love and powers [*Können*]: 'If you are willing you can.'" "Therefore," Schlatter remarks, "our thinking is given the task that when we look toward God we do not split up the unity of his power and love."<sup>84</sup> However, the critical points and desiderata, which we have articulated on the basis of Schlatter's problem-awareness, can only be met if the divine mode of action is understood in personal terms.

It is true that where God appears man becomes a disappearing nothing and a worthless unimportance. What, then is their significance – Moses Isaiah, John and Paul? Here the word of the apostle is fitting: 'Whatever they may have been, is not important to me.' Yet, to know the one and only true God through Scripture, that must be our highest priority. With this idea, however, we have not yet fully comprehended God's manner and way. We have only paid attention to God's power which sets man in the depth far below the magnificence of God. But in Scripture God wants to show us something other than his power. For this reason he did not reveal himself in that he degraded man, pushed him aside and made him disappear. Rather, God revealed himself by awakening people, lifting them up to himself, placing them in communion with himself, and thus entrusting to them the office and service of being his witnesses in the world. This gives us a true revelation of God, a divine word that fully reveals himself; this is the way of grace. God makes human beings his witnesses through whom we know and hear him. This is not the weakness but *the glory of Scripture* (emphasis Schlatter).<sup>85</sup>

Schlatter attempts to transcend the natural analogies of force and power through the personal analogies of grace and love.<sup>86</sup> To grasp the promise of this move in the context of our discussion is the concern of the following sections.

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<sup>83</sup> "Glaube an die Bibel," 241. This passage indicates what will concern us in greater detail later, namely that Schlatter argues for Christ as the rule of thought for any concept of the relation of God's being and action and human being and action.

<sup>84</sup> *Dienst*, 54. In a similar context Schlatter outlines the unity of God's love and God's sovereignty, holiness, righteousness, and wrath (*Dogma*, 196-98).

<sup>85</sup> *Einleitung*, 479.

<sup>86</sup> See *Dienst*, 54; *Dogma*, 259.



## ii. Characteristics of personal action

In Schlatter the mode of divine agency is grounded in God's personal being.<sup>87</sup> In analogy to man, God acts as a personal self in the unity of his consciousness and through his thinking and willing. On this basis a number of aspects emerge which characterise God's agency as personal agency.<sup>88</sup>

### a) Conscious action

To interpret divine agency through personal analogies means, first of all, to ground the divine acts in God's consciousness. Therefore, Schlatter argues, divine activity must not be seen as emanation so that "God pours out what is in himself." Rather than being a "discharging force no longer contained inwardly by the bond of unity"<sup>89</sup> every divine act is a conscious one, for it has its basis in God's will: "Because in God there is nothing dark, unconscious or dependent – every activity of God originates from his will. Through the latter we are created (Rev 4:11) and born again (Jas 4:15; Eph 1,5)."<sup>90</sup>

Before we continue to elaborate how Schlatter further qualifies divine action as conscious and personal action, we need to pinpoint Schlatter's intention behind the idea that God's action is grounded in God's will. Schlatter wants to make clear that divine causality is precisely agency, and not a mere force, which reveals itself in effects. "Since we have to derive all relations in which we are placed to God, from his will, we gain the predication that they are *deeds* or *works*, not merely the effects of forces or the consequences of processes taking place in God. This applies to creation as well as redemption and perfection"

<sup>87</sup> The way in which Schlatter analogically derives God's personal being from the contingent being of the human person is well presented in Neuer, *Zusammenhang*, 69-70.

<sup>88</sup> The structure and terminology of the following is partly inspired by Schwöbel, *God: Action and Revelation*, 36-37.

<sup>89</sup> *Dogma*, 36. Cf. *\*Dogmatik I*, 195.

<sup>90</sup> "Wille," 827; similarly in *Andachten*, 197; *\*Wesen und Quellen*, 37; *Metaphysik*, 88.

(emphasis Schlatter). This is the point at which Schlatter explicitly refers to God's agency as *Heilsgeschichte*. "As soon as God is affirmed as will, the course of this world presents itself to us as a system of actions which are, in themselves, connected through the unity of the one actor and will."<sup>91</sup> Thus, in a roundabout way, Schlatter argues for history as the place where the personal character of God's being and the personal mode of his actions is revealed: "In that God creates history, he, as person, enters into contact with us and reveals his holy and gracious will to us."<sup>92</sup>

#### b) Intentional action

The notion of will alone does not yet prevent theological thought from lapsing back into an impersonal understanding of divine action. In Schlatter's view, this relapse is imminent when the divine will is isolated from the rest of our knowledge about God's consciousness. Such a "hypostasized abstraction" empties God's will of all content and leaves us with nothing but the idea of "causal power," "unlimited power of causing [*Macht zum Wirken*]," and "arbitrariness."<sup>93</sup> On the basis of these observations Schlatter grounds divine action not only in God's will but also in God's thinking, knowing and wisdom.<sup>94</sup>

The perfect unity which marks the deity is also the characteristic of the divine will. God himself is the ground of his will and knows it as that which is completely his own. Since the divine unity has the fullness in itself, the idea of choice reaches its fullest completion here. The divine choice orders and determines the fullness of aims which evolve from the opulence of the divine creator-power [*Schöpfermacht*].<sup>95</sup>

In this way Schlatter qualifies divine action as intentional action. This means that God, as personal agent, not only wills and chooses to act, but in his willing and thinking determines

<sup>91</sup> *Dogma*, 180-81. In the correlating footnote Schlatter talks about "*Heilsgeschichte*" as "the system of the divine deeds" (ibid., 573 n. 109).

<sup>92</sup> "Heilige Geschichte," 217.

<sup>93</sup> See *Dogma*, 180, 479.

<sup>94</sup> See e.g. ibid., 479.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 178.

the object and the purpose of his actions. Moreover, the divine choice also concerns the actional means through which God regulates his actions in order to reach the aims he has set himself.<sup>96</sup> With regard to the divine wisdom, Schlatter speaks about "God's thoughts . . . which order his activity in the world and determine it according to its way and goal . . . ."<sup>97</sup> This concept of intentional action underlies Schlatter's talk about the incomprehensible "diversity of [divine] activities which are qualitatively distinguished from one another." It is as personal agent that God is able to relate to, and act upon, different objects in forms and ways appropriate to their respective being.<sup>98</sup> Applied to the human person, this insight sounds as follows: "God treats a human 'I' not as an object for the actuation of his force, but is himself, through his thinking and willing, with it and in it."<sup>99</sup> Indeed, Schlatter goes so far as to say "that it is not normal to regard oneself as 'wood and stone' in relation to God – that such life- and lovelessness should rather be regarded as sin" and as a sign "that God's grace, Spirit, and Word are not with us."<sup>100</sup>

### c) Free action

In everything that has been said thus far, Schlatter ascribes to God the freedom of action and the freedom of choice.<sup>101</sup> Schlatter marks this predication as the point at which theological reflection about God's personal agency reaches its limits. The conscious proc-

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<sup>96</sup> This aspect was already inherent in Schlatter's idea of *Heilsgeschichte* "as a system of actions which are in themselves connected through the unity of the one actor and will."

<sup>97</sup> "Weisheit oder Torheit," 108.

<sup>98</sup> See *Dogma*, 37; cf. especially what we have said above about the distinctness of man's *imago Dei* (pp. 31-35) and about the differentiation of creation and providence (pp. 41-43).

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 337. Although this quotation is taken from Schlatter's christology, its context allows us to apply it to God's interrelation and interaction with man in general.

<sup>100</sup> *Dienst*, 41; see also Rieger, *Rechtfertigungslehre*, 276-278.

<sup>101</sup> See e.g. \**Wesen und Quellen*, 37, 75.

esses in God which lead to a divine act are "no object for our thinking."<sup>102</sup> Yet what can and must be said is that "God himself is the ground of his will and knows it as that which is completely his own."<sup>103</sup> Thus, divine action is constituted by God himself.

God's will governs humanity in freedom and omnipotence. God's judgements are unsearchable and his ways beyond tracing out. Paul expresses this by means of Isa 40:13. The individual is able to offer God neither counsel nor contribution. There are no human thoughts that might give God direction, nor human accomplishments to obligate him.<sup>104</sup>

Schlatter ascribes the same freedom to God's thinking "which is free of any necessity, which rather sets necessities itself – for it has the plastic, creative power [*die plastische, schöpferische Macht*] in itself."<sup>105</sup> In sum: There is an absolute freedom in God concerning the grounding of his agency in the unity of his personal consciousness.

What God is for us does not come about in time and is not subject to becoming and decay. God's will has eternal status – even the will in which he calls us to himself and makes us alive for himself. It does not depend on that which we have experienced and worked in time, but it precedes not only our work but also our existence because it is God's own will.<sup>106</sup>

### iii. Personal action, Word and history

We have already observed that the togetherness of the divine Word and power is central to Schlatter's understanding of the sovereignty, freedom and creativity of God in his actions. At the same time, this togetherness constitutes the context in which Schlatter develops another central feature of his concept of personal divine action. The unity of Word and power means that God is not merely acting out his capacity to think and will. Rather, he reveals his thought and will through his Word and acts as the speaking one. Divine

<sup>102</sup> *Dogma*, 479; cf. Schlatter's theological cautiousness regarding the divine blessedness in *ibid.*, 139.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 178; similarly in *Erläuterungen III*, 436.

<sup>104</sup> *Romans*, 226. Similarly in *Dogma*, 185; "Zwei Scharen von Hoffenden," 330.

<sup>105</sup> *Dogma*, 124.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 474.

agency is mediated through the divine Word, an insight which Schlatter unfolds primarily in connection with the past and present creative acts of God.<sup>107</sup>

It lies in God's superiority to us that we have to conceive of the unity of his fullness as perfectly as it is possible to our ability to think. Therefore, we connect the divine thinking and speaking with the creative power [*Schöpfermacht*]. God's thought is a plastic force [*plastische Kraft*], not separated from the productive capability [*Produktionsvermögen*] but in complete unity with it. Thus, his thinking is that which sets the real; he speaks and it happens. . . . Through the union of the creative power with the Word, the independence of the world is secured and, at the same time, the melting-theories [*Verschmelzungstheorien*] which dissolve the 'I' and things into God are prevented. It is not a community of substance or force which we should state concerning ourselves and God, but that the divine thinking and willing makes us the way we are.<sup>108</sup>

In analogy to the first creation, the divine Word is also the mediator of the second creation – the new man. According to Schlatter, it is highly questionable to ground one's faith solely in the divine power, which is undoubtedly an "essential characteristic of the divine glory." Yet the attempt to gain the grounds of faith somewhere apart from God's Word would mean a distortion in our picture of God – the cancellation "of the highest and most holy in him."

We make God dumb to ourselves and, consequently, close ourselves from his God-heart. Thus, he is no longer the one who as person is open and alive to us. With the dumb God there is no communion [*Verkehr*]. The power that shapes me and makes me its form does not yet institute communion between myself and itself – not even if it exercises its effects in me internally; guides my thinking; founds my willing, and awakens my love. All this is not yet communion with God. Of course, in this way I receive a word that addresses him, however, it is me alone who is speaking. This is not communion. Talking to myself is not communion, but his talking to me. We are not those speaking to the silent God. Rather, it is only his Word which commences the conversation of our heart with him. Because he has spoken and has made us listeners, because he has given us words which are his own, which he has transmitted to us through his messengers, therefore a status of faith has been prepared for us that is truly communion [*Verkehr*] with him or, according to the Apostle's word, community with him. That we know and affirm these words as his own, carry them in our hearts and take them into our mouth in thankfulness, petition and praise – that is the fundament of our faith.<sup>109</sup>

<sup>107</sup> See *Johannes*, 4-7; "Jesus und wir heutigen Menschen," 209; "Wunder der Bibel," 72; \**Dogmatik I*, 195; *Erläuterungen I*, 604.

<sup>108</sup> *Dogma*, 123.

<sup>109</sup> "Glaube an die Bibel," 233. In the whole section (pp. 233-35) Schlatter focusses on the disregard of the word" and concludes: "We wish to experience the power of God, however, the first thing we need as our preparation for faith is grace, and the first act of grace is that God speaks to us. We hear God's friendliness and love. For this reason, the affirmation of his word is the fundament of our faith" (235).

To put it as briefly as possible: "It is through the Word that every creative act [*Schöpfungstat*] happened and happens."<sup>110</sup> Walldorf has clearly outlined that in Schlatter the creative Logos of God is not only the ontological basis of the being and nature of every creature but also the ontological enabling ground of creation's intelligibility, rationality and human knowability.<sup>111</sup> However, what we have to note is that, in Schlatter's view, God's Word renders his action ultimately personal. To say that God creates through his Word is "to ascertain the personal manner of the act of creation."<sup>112</sup> At this point we see most clearly how the idea of personal action enables Schlatter to relate God and man without divesting either of them of their respective being. Through his Word, God is able to relate to, and interact with, man without ceasing to be God and without undermining the distinctness and particularity of the human person in its otherness vis-à-vis himself. As the above quote suggests, the divine Word institutes a personal rather than a substantial community.

The relation instituted through the creative Word [*Schöpfungswort*] gives both their autonomy [*Selbständigkeit*]. The Logos idea secures not only God's supremacy but also the reality of the world against all *Akosmie*, against the dissolving of the human 'I' and of nature into the divine substance. The divinity mediates itself only through the Word, giving us our own being [*Wesenheit*] formed through God's thought, instituted through God's power.<sup>113</sup>

Thus Schlatter again affirms that the personal mode of divine action mediated through the divine Word brings forth history, that is, personal relationship and interaction of God and man which leaves space for both to be, and act, in propriety to their individual identity. "Because God grips us and reigns over us through his Word, he deals with us as Spirit with spirit and lifts us beyond that which nature contains and enables us to partake in a sacred

<sup>110</sup> *Erläuterungen I*, 604; similarly in *Johannes*, 5.

<sup>111</sup> See Walldorf, *Realistische Philosophie*, 133-41; cf. Neuer, *Zusammenhang*, 80-81 and von Lüpke's recent essay "Gottes Gaben wahrnehmen," 288.

<sup>112</sup> *\*Dogmatik I*, 195.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 195-96.

history and leads us to him – the personal God – as persons."<sup>114</sup> Schlatter also puts it this way: "The divine Word has creative power. Therefore it works history and comes to us as the fruit of history."<sup>115</sup>

## **B. Personal action as grace and love**

### **i. Personal action as grace**

Schlatter takes his concept of divine action a step forward by defining God's agency not only as personal agency but as grace. Central in this connection is Schlatter's conviction that the God of Scripture is good – indeed, the only one who is truly good, who "negates evil," and "wills and creates the good."<sup>116</sup> The notion of God's good, giving and creative will appears throughout Schlatter's works and is tied up with the idea of God's goodness and grace: "Grace is giving will . . ."<sup>117</sup> Put differently, grace is God's eternal "form of will [*Willensgestalt*]"<sup>118</sup> and "originates from his own goodness."<sup>119</sup> On these grounds, God's grace has to be seen as the mode of his agency. "God's behaviour towards us is grace, giving goodness, an affirmation that applies to us, which gives us an individual life [*Eigenleben*] because it [the grace] makes that which it gives to us our property."<sup>120</sup> In other words, God has determined himself to act *pro nobis*. As we have elaborated above, God creates; enables; upholds, redeems and perfects the human creature, and all of these actions reveal

<sup>114</sup> "Glaube an die Bibel," 234.

<sup>115</sup> "Vergebung der Sünden," 19.

<sup>116</sup> "Moral oder Evangelium," 94; for further references see Neuer, *Zusammenhang*, 73-74.

<sup>117</sup> "Bedeutung des Denkens," 326; cf. *Sprechstunde*, 67; *Metaphysik*, 87; *Opfer*, 3, 14; "Schätzung der Individualität," 127; \**Philosophie und Christentum*, 28.

<sup>118</sup> "Christi Versöhnen," 191.

<sup>119</sup> "Wille," 827.

<sup>120</sup> *Selbstdarstellungen*, 154.

that he wills to give his goodness to man.<sup>121</sup> They witness, as Schlatter phrases it, "that the power on which we depend is kind and cares for us; the one who helps us with almighty goodness, we call God."<sup>122</sup> Hence, Schlatter simply talks about the "divine giving" or God as the one who gives.<sup>123</sup>

Since the divine action of grace is grounded in God's own goodness, it is sovereign and independent of any precondition.

Paul knew of no other righteousness except God's, which derives its premise and nature from what God is. God's declaration in Exod 33:19 states what God is like: what allows the individual to share in God is his mercy. His mercy is his own decision and does not depend upon what the individual does. It would not be mercy if it were based upon the worth of the individual's work. God gives mercy to whomever he wants to give it. This attests to the deity of God that knows of no dependence upon the individual.<sup>124</sup>

Schlatter speaks of "the omnipotence of the divine grace" and of God's "almighty grace" in order to articulate the sovereignty, unlimitedness and independence of the divine grace.<sup>125</sup> This is the crucial move – that the divine causality is no longer conceived of in terms of power alone but as taking place in the personal mode of grace. Through this Schlatter obviates the danger of theo-monism. The anti-monistic thrust of his thought is already observable in his idea of God's good and giving will:

His [Jesus'] God is will, in fact, not the will of an absolute egoist, who for the sake of his revelation annihilates all other life outside himself, but the giving will, who creates life and gives will, and who, therefore, requires obedience and judges disobedience. He accuses of guilt and forgives guilt; he separates the evil one from himself and reconciles him with himself; he takes the glory away from man if the latter separates from him, and gives him glory in that he [God] unites him with himself.<sup>126</sup>

<sup>121</sup> Cf. *Gründe*, 29, quoted above p. 22; *Theology of the Apostles*, 362; *Andachten*, 367 ("Everything God does to those who belong to him, is grace.").

<sup>122</sup> *Andachten*, 296; cf. "Wunder," 832 where Schlatter qualifies God's omnipotence in terms of the omnipotence of the gracious Father (quoted above, p. 50).

<sup>123</sup> See e.g. *Dogma*, 57, 157; 371; *Theology of the Apostles*, 362; "Natur, Sünde und Gnade," 65; *Dienst*, 46; "Noch ein Wort," 120; "Glaube und Geschichte," 346; *Sprechstunde*, 56; "Wort und Schrift," 26-34.

<sup>124</sup> *Romans*, 205-06; see also *Dogma*, 144, 185; "Wille," 827; *Andachten*, 376; *Kennen wir Jesus?*, 90-91; "Pforte zum Römerbrief," 65-66.

<sup>125</sup> See e.g. *Dogma*, 371; *Andachten*, 392; *Kennen wir Jesus?*, 50, 389-90; *Opfer*, 48; *Sprechstunde*, 9; "Wunder der Bibel," 79; "Zwei Scharen von Hoffenden," 317.

<sup>126</sup> "Zweifel an der Messianität," 196; see also "Entwicklung des jüdischen Christentums," 241-43.



In qualifying divine causality as personal action of grace, Schlatter wants to show that God's action does not contradict, undermine, or even destroy man as the actional object and recipient of the divine effect. Just the opposite – through grace as its mode, divine action is always oriented toward the concrete and individual life of man in his being-other-than-God. The New Testament, Schlatter explains,

witnesses to God's giving, which is seriously meant and efficacious; it makes man someone who receives it, and it shapes him. God's creating and giving penetrate man's existence and consciousness in their concrete, historically determined form. It establishes him and becomes visible in and through him. God does his work of grace and judgment not outside man and so, too, not beyond history, but in it and through it.<sup>127</sup>

God's action of grace is the central theme of Schlatter's works on the *Dienst des Christen*. Along the lines of what we have said thus far he states that grace "does not regard its recipient as nil; rather it aims at him, seeks and wills him, affirms him, and lifts him up into vivacity, honour and power."<sup>128</sup> Divine grace is truly creative:

Grace seeks and creates its recipient and, therefore sets us into passivity. However, it seriously makes us its recipients so that it effects us, empowers us and transposes us into vivacity [*Lebendigkeit*]. Therefore, there is no receiving of the divine gift without the activity founded by it in us, as little as there is an activity which does not have – prior to it as its ground and after it as its fruit and goal – the receiving of the divine gift.<sup>129</sup>

In other words, the divine grace not only acts towards, or upon, man as its recipient but also in man – by creating and enabling him and through man – by empowering man to be "its instrument and organ."<sup>130</sup> Schlatter summarises this understanding of the efficaciousness of God's grace under the term "rule of grace."<sup>131</sup>

The notion of God's creative grace is central to Schlatter's attempt to untie some of the knots of a theory of divine action. This shall concern us in a separate section below. For

<sup>127</sup> "Theology of the New Testament and Dogmatics," 199.

<sup>128</sup> *Dienst*, 22; cf. *ibid.*, 43-44; *Dogma*, 377.

<sup>129</sup> "Noch ein Wort," 100; similarly in "Wille," 827; "Bedeutung des Denkens," 326; "Sollen wir gegen unsere Sünde kämpfen," 90; *Furcht vor dem Denken*, 60; "Wandel nach dem Geist," 15.

<sup>130</sup> "Auch eine Gabe," 25; cf. *Dogma*, 511; *Gründe*, 71.

<sup>131</sup> See *Rückblick*, 104; *Briefe*, 64-65. Cf. also the term "way of grace" in the citation above p. 112 n. 85.

now we note that the idea of personal action of grace constitutes the conceptual basis on which Schlatter propounds that the contingency of the human creature upon the divine causality is more than just passivity and dependence but precisely that which constitutes man as a person in relationship to God:

He [God] is and reigns; but he is the grace for which reason his giving institutes property; his activity creates life; his will awakens will. Hence, his relationship to us is intended to be of that kind which develops between persons – not only between forces and substances, not only between natural factors . . . He is an 'I' and reveals himself to me as an 'I' in that he presents me with an 'I' and thus becomes a 'Thou' to me.<sup>132</sup>

## ii. Personal action as love

All the decisive aspects of Schlatter's understanding of divine action as grace return, albeit in somewhat different form, in his notion of divine action as love. Schlatter himself was filled with a deep respect for the mystery of God's love: he did not dare to speak publicly about 1Jn 4:8 (God is love) till he was 83 years old.<sup>133</sup> Love "is the final word that we can reach about God."<sup>134</sup> Important for our considerations is Schlatter's view of the supremacy of love regarding God's being and action: "God is love; he is love not among other things – he *is* it in all he is" and, as Schlatter adds a few sentences later, "in all he is and does."<sup>135</sup> Based on what we have said thus far about divine personal action, Schlatter's linking of love and will is only consequent:

It [love] is the highest and ruling form [*Gestalt*] of the divine will and penetrates everything God thinks and does . . . Because of it he is the Creator and ruler of the world. Out of its holy greatness and truthfulness springs the seriousness of his wrath and judgement, and his righteousness has its ground

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<sup>132</sup> "Unterwerfung," 9-10; similarly in "Selbstdarstellungen," 154.

<sup>133</sup> "Weihnachtsansprache," 64; cf. Neuer, *Zusammenhang*, 100.

<sup>134</sup> *Dogma*, 196. For the following see also Neuer, *Zusammenhang*, 96-101; Walldorf, *Realistische Philosophie*, 212 n. 136; Rieger, *Rechtfertigungslehre*, 380-97, especially 380-85.

<sup>135</sup> "Weihnachtsansprache," 64-65.

in it. Therefore, it alone makes God's words and works understandable, and the one who does not have it is blind to God.<sup>136</sup>

A number of aspects deserve our attention here. To begin with, God is absolutely free and sovereign in his love. This is because of the perfection of God's being and love which transcends human love: "It is God's nature to be love, not ours."<sup>137</sup> Divine love is "pure love, whole love"<sup>138</sup> This is to say that God is not in need of any love or gift for which reason his action is free of "selfishness," "self-preservation," "egoism," and "self-realisation."<sup>139</sup> Hence, Schlatter conceives of God's love to be absolute and free regarding its factuality and efficacy: "The love of God is the free and complete cause, his own act, in which he reveals himself . . . ."<sup>140</sup> Schlatter's expression, "omnipotence of the creative love," appears to be an apt summary of his thoughts.<sup>141</sup>

What follows from the material just presented is that orientation towards the other which we already met in Schlatter's exposition of divine action as grace. When Schlatter talks about love as the "highest form" of the divine will, he refers to "goodwill," to the "giving will."<sup>142</sup> Love freely and actively seeks the well-being of the other, and precisely this is the central idea behind terms such as "creative will," "creative love," and "love which has the creative power in itself."<sup>143</sup>

The kind of love that consumes a person's inner life and leaves no goal or desire that would provide him with the meaning of his own life, would be a nonsensical procedure in Jesus' view. Love cannot yield this result in relation to God since God is good and himself the one who gives, the one who

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<sup>136</sup> *Erläuterungen III*, 155-56. The most direct connection appears in the term "*Liebeswille*" (*Kennen wir Jesus?*, 39). Schlatter's linking of love and will can also be observed on the formal level when he outlines the idea of love in the sections on the will (*Dogma*, 186-98; *Ethik*, 116-35).

<sup>137</sup> "Weihnachtsansprache," 68.

<sup>138</sup> *Kennen wir Jesus?*, 90.

<sup>139</sup> See *Dogma*, 192; \**Dogmatik I*, 140-41; \**Kritische Bemerkungen*, 19; *Kennen wir Jesus?*, 90.

<sup>140</sup> *Dogma*, 144.

<sup>141</sup> "Evangelium und Bekenntnis," 22.

<sup>142</sup> Schlatter identifies "the goodwill in its ripeness" with "love" (\**Wesen und Quellen*, 105). See also *Dogma*, 186, 196; *Paulus der Bote*, 419; *Furcht vor dem Denken*, 42.

<sup>143</sup> See "Weihnachtsansprache," 64; *Kennen wir Jesus?*, 39, 218.

grants man life and who preserves and perfects him. Love that did not seek or receive anything from God would deny what God's love desires and produces [*schafft*]. If that were the case, God's will would be presented as complete selfishness that absorbs everything; Jesus conceived of God's love as a genuine doing of good by which the individual received his life and his strength.<sup>144</sup>

These words shed the decisive light on Schlatter's notion of man being created in the image of God.

Out of his love arises our authority for own willing, for own acting. Because his Word enters into us we are enabled to think truth, and because his command speaks in us we are gifted with the capacity to work righteousness, and because he makes us partakers in his work he makes it our honour that we are allowed to serve him. This is the nature of love – that it gives and makes the one it loves, rich.<sup>145</sup>

Human personhood, human capacity for free and self-determined action in its particularity; otherness, and *Selbständigkeit* vis-à-vis God is, from beginning to end, grounded in the divine action of love.

"Why does the individual life of the creature emerge? Because God wills the creature with an affirmation that is seriously meant for it. Why does it [the creature] have the power to judge its own will and thought? Because God wills it as the possessor of an own life. Why are we – notwithstanding the abnormality of our thinking and willing – nurtured by the power source of nature? Through this we receive mercy [*Schonung*] and patience. Whence should this come if it is not grounded in love? We have the hope of redemption and repentance and even experience both in manifold ways. The will that keeps open for us the possibility to return and grants us a new beginning, is love."<sup>146</sup>

#### 4. Towards a Trinitarian Theory of Divine Action

##### A. The mediation of divine action through Christ

A representation of Schlatter's concept of divine agency would remain incomplete without an outline of his understanding of the mediation of divine action. This mediation is no longer one through creaturely agents or causes, as we have outlined above, but the mediation of God's actions through his Son and his Spirit: "Two mediators of divine grace stand before us and do their work on us: the Christ and the Spirit."<sup>147</sup> In the wake of the

<sup>144</sup> *History of the Christ*, 162.

<sup>145</sup> *Kennen wir Jesus?*, 91; similarly in *Dogma*, 197; "Heilige Geschichte," 216.

<sup>146</sup> *Dogma*, 196; cf. *Ethik*, 87.

<sup>147</sup> *Dogma*, 352; cf. *ibid.*, 354; *Erläuterungen II*, 280-81.

idea of mediation, Schlatter's concept of divine agency assumes a trinitarian character. This suggests that a full comprehension of Schlatter's theory of divine action can only be achieved after having investigated his doctrine of the Trinity. Yet, as we shall see, Schlatter's notion of God's personal action as grace and love culminates, so to speak, in his idea of the personal mediation of divine agency through the Son and the Spirit. Therefore, we present the central aspects of this subject at this point of the discussion, accepting that some issues must await their full explication during the further course of this study.

i. The divine Logos, the eternal Son of God and the *logoi* of creation<sup>148</sup>

We have demonstrated above that the divine thinking, wisdom and Word are fundamental to Schlatter's concept of God's agency. God acts upon this world through his Word, his Logos. Based on his exegesis of Jn 1:1-14, Schlatter argues that through the connection of the Logos with the human Jesus, the former is personally qualified: "Because the word is God's Word, it is 'the cause' of everything brought into being. This cause is, however, not *neutrum* nor merely force, but will and thought; consciousness; active person."<sup>149</sup> On this basis, Schlatter holds, John makes it difficult to think of the Logos of God in Stoic terms as God's elemental power.<sup>150</sup> Similarly, God's Word does not mean "the ground of reason that creates the world in Stoic thought."<sup>151</sup> God's Logos is neither an abstract nor rational capacity to think, nor a world-plan constructed in God's mind. Rather, it was in Christ that the divine Logos assumed flesh. Thus, Schlatter remarks, John talks about the

<sup>148</sup> For the following see also Walldorf, *Realistische Philosophie*, 135-36.

<sup>149</sup> *Johannes*, 2. Similarly in *Theology of the Apostles*, 136.

<sup>150</sup> See *Theology of the Apostles*, 136.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

personal God, who speaks his Word; and about the human person, who listens to the divine Word.<sup>152</sup>

Schlatter's argument for distinguishing between the divine Logos and possible other *logoi* is fortified in his critique that the divine Logos must not primarily, or even exclusively, be seen in relation to the created world.

The divine thinking possesses perfection also in such a way that it is not only turned toward the world but also turned inwardly toward God. With this we give the Hellenising teachings on thinking and logos their necessary correction. For their assumption – that the content of God's Word consists solely or primarily in the world-plan – encroaches on the notion of God. God's Word is primarily God's image.<sup>153</sup>

The terminology of image suggests that Schlatter regards the divine Logos as an eternal counterpart which God has in himself, an idea which he articulates as follows: "God does not have forces, objects or things in himself. Rather, he makes even his Word and his Spirit capable of themselves [*ihrer selbst mächtig*], makes them alive in themselves, and makes them persons."<sup>154</sup> Thus, Schlatter draws a clear line of demarcation between the divine Logos and the *logoi* of creation.

He [God] does not speak many words but one Word and his word is *the* Word. The latter does not have its content just in the world, but primarily in God. As that which is beheld and known by God, it is with God. Because God knows it as his Word and unites it with himself, it has the deity, it is God, Jn 1:1. These are the final conceptions we can achieve about the divine act of thinking (emphasis Schlatter).<sup>155</sup>

Along these lines Schlatter identifies the divine Logos with the eternal Son of God, so that the following words must be seen as the ultimate statement and summary of his thoughts:

"[I]t [God's Word] is God himself, God's Son."<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> *Johannes*, 2.

<sup>153</sup> *Dogma*, 123. See also *Erläuterungen I*, 604.

<sup>154</sup> *Dogma*, 179-80.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>156</sup> "Wort," 830.

## ii. The exclusiveness of Christ's mediation

The eternal Son of God assumed human flesh in Jesus Christ and became the incarnate Word of God directed to, and spoken in, creation. The repercussion of this on Schlatter's understanding of the mediation of divine action is that the forms and ideas that give structure, unity, rationality and intelligibility to the cosmos can no longer be seen as the mediators between God and the world. This does not mean that Schlatter rejects those metaphysical realities created by God by which he – through his creative Logos and in his wisdom – orders the cosmos and makes it intelligible. Yet, these *logoi* can neither supplement nor replace the one Logos, Jesus Christ, as the one mediator between God and man.

John conceived of God as a person, especially when he distinguished between God and his Word and ascribed to the Word the undiminished entirety of the divine life and complete deity. . . . [T]he supposition may be correct that John expected he would illustrate Jesus' union with the Father for the Greeks by way of the term 'Word' and to aid their understanding of the reason why their access to God occurred by way of faith in the man Jesus. For those who took part in Greek education were able to link the term "Logos" with the concept of the pervasive divine government and express by it what was divine in nature and in man. John protects his thought from Greek influences by defining the Word solely in terms of Jesus' history. The community is to realize, not in nature or spiritual processes, but in Jesus what God has with himself as his eternal Word, by which he created the world and by which he rules it and leads it to himself. Thereby John was able to fend off Greek ideas that posited a unity between God and human reason and natural law.<sup>157</sup>

If we draw out these lines a little further we see that Schlatter sets the divine Logos in direct antithesis to man's logos. In his critique of "*Denkreligion*" (rationalistic religion), Schlatter elaborates that identifying the divine Logos with the *logoi* of creation leads – together with a rationalistic anthropology and epistemology – to the idea that a certain form of reason, which comprehends this world and abstracts its principles and metaphysical

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<sup>157</sup> *Theology of the Apostles*, 168-69. Gunton, in his analysis of Greek concepts of logos and their appropriation in Western theology, reaches similar conclusions. He states: "The founders of medieval ontology were therefore Philo and Augustine, who transferred the eternal Platonic forms from 'external' reality to the mind of God. Effectively this crowded out the trinitarian, and particularly Christological, mediation of the doctrine of creation. . . . The Philonic and Augustinian development means that the coeternal and personal mediator of God's creating work is effectively replaced by the *almost* eternal Platonic forms. The Logos is crowded out by the logoi" ("The Trinity, Natural Theology, and a Theology of Nature," 93). Schlatter's view of the "relationships that developed between Platonic ideas, Aristotelian reason, and Stoic thought on the one hand and the teaching on God on part of the Greek and Jerusalem synagogue on the other" (*Theology of the Apostles*, 168) can be found in *Geschichte Israels*, 295-303.

categories, establishes unity with the divine thinking and thus exercises the mediating function between man and God.<sup>158</sup> Schlatter decidedly highlights the points which render this approach incompatible with the biblical understanding of the church as the community of faith and its participation in God.

In Plato and Aristotle, and even later on in Stoicism, we find quite admirable definitions of faith. But this does not mean that faith was valued in those systems as the one factor that decides the course of our whole life and unites us into a community. In Hellenic piety knowledge (*gnosis*), rather than faith, was the dominant ideal. The religious Greek aspired towards right thinking; he exercised his mental faculties in order to unveil the divine and find the right philosophical expressions for physics and metaphysics. From knowledge he also expected the highest prize of religion, union with God. The Christians, on the other hand, were from the outset neither a society of 'righteous' men, nor yet a band of 'gnostics,' but the community of *believers*; and this was so because the Church was brought into existence by what happened at the first Easter (emphasis Schlatter).<sup>159</sup>

The logical outcome of this notion is, as Schlatter reasons, a concept of God's being as pure thinking (Aristotle's *noesis noeseos*), through which a distinction is upheld between human thinking and God's thinking.<sup>160</sup>

It is through God's Logos, who assumed flesh and was personally spoken to creation in the person and work of the incarnate Son, Jesus Christ, that *Denkreligion* is made impossible: "Through the cross of Christ the God vanished . . . who is nothing but reason so that the achievement of our faculty of thinking is supposed to unite us with him."<sup>161</sup> Schlatter explicitly states Jesus Christ as the destroyer of "that religion known to us all which consists of pious thoughts, words, knowledge and doctrinal statements. Should our unification

<sup>158</sup> See e.g. *Furcht vor dem Denken*, 51; *Metaphysik*, 38; *Gründe*, 28; \**Philosophie und Christentum*, 18-19.

<sup>159</sup> *Church in the New Testament Period*, 6. Similarly in "Paulus und das Griechentum,". Here Schlatter shows that the striving to "understand God's world-plan" and to penetrate into "the divine process of thinking," is the "religious behaviour" resulting from *Denkreligion*. This behaviour is diametrically opposed to Christian faith as "the attachedness of our person to the one whose gift founds, moves and completes our whole existence" (pp. 134-35).

<sup>160</sup> See e.g. *Dogma*, 565, 582-83, 285-86. Schlatter's critique of *Denkreligion* is a continuum of his critical engagement with what he calls "Griechentum." This is the term under which Schlatter – sometimes in a rather undifferentiated manner – discusses philosophical concepts which, in his view, reach "from Plato in an unbroken tradition through Kant down into the present" (*Briefe*, 18; cf. *Rückblick*, 40). Neuer and recently Walldorf have forcefully outlined that Schlatter's grappling with Greek philosophy is an indirect grappling with idealism. See especially Neuer's essay "Der Idealismus und die Erweckung" and his "Introduction *Metaphysik*," 10-11; Walldorf, *Realistische Philosophie*, 214-24.

<sup>161</sup> *Dogma*, 295.



and reconciliation with God not consist in that we are able to know, talk and preach what God is and works?" Schlatter response is this: "However, this idol, which we honour merely with words and thoughts because it is nothing but perfect reason, must vanish; otherwise we will never be reconciled with God. For our thoughts are too short and his thoughts are too great to come together."<sup>162</sup> In other words, the cross of Christ turns the wisdom of man, who strives to know God by comprehending the divine thoughts and works in this world, into foolishness. In his essay on 1 Cor 1:17-2:16 Schlatter states:

God, however, executes a devastating judgement on the wisdom of the world by laying the salvation of the world into such a foolish deed (1:19). For in this form it [the wisdom of the world] is completely unable to know God, and this the less, the more it means to know God and the higher it develops its thoughts about God and his doing [*Tun*].<sup>163</sup>

Christ, the Logos, transcends, dismantles and destroys any type of religion and theology in which the human logos has seized the mediatory role between man and God. In this sense we may indeed say that in Schlatter's theology divine thinking is counter-thinking, divine wisdom is counter-wisdom, and the divine Logos is the counter-Logos.<sup>164</sup>

### iii. The christological mediation of all divine actions

How Schlatter's notion of the divine Logos is anchored in his doctrine of the Trinity shall be examined later. Our focus now is on Schlatter's idea "that God's whole acting takes

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<sup>162</sup> "Kreuz Jesu," 10.

<sup>163</sup> "Weisheit oder Torheit," 111. Schlatter argues that the philosophical work since Descartes also eventuated in the collapse of *Denkreligion*: "God has made the wisdom of this world into foolishness.' This happened through the finale of the work of Jesus and the founding of the church; it has happened again through the philosophical history of the recent generations" (*Philosophische Arbeit*, 283).

<sup>164</sup> With this interpretation we discover Schlatter's thoughts to be close to Bonhoeffer's notion of Christ as the Anti-Logos. Christ is the Logos who, in assuming humanity, became flesh and entered the human logos. Yet, Bonhoeffer emphatically underlines: "It should, however, be noted here that the Logos of God may not be identified with the human Logos, as in German idealism, nor may it be thought of as analogous to it, as in Catholicism" (*Christology*, 50). Indeed, the divine Logos is not only distinct from the human logos but stands in antithesis over against it (*Christology*, 30): "But what if the Anti-Logos raises his claim in a completely new form? If he is no longer an idea, but a Word, which challenges the supremacy of the Logos? If he appears at some time and in some place in history as a person? If he declares himself to be a judgment on the human Logos and points to himself: I am the Way, the Truth and the Life; I am the death of the human Logos, I am the life of God's Logos . . .?"

place through his [Christ's] mediation and that he is God's organ and instrument in all divine workings [*Walten*]."<sup>165</sup> To talk about Christ's mediatorship means for Schlatter to say "[h]ow divine agency reaches us," "how God's agency comes to us."<sup>166</sup> The mediator is the "carrier of the divine agency and gift" and through him "God himself is present and effective."<sup>167</sup> This point is crucial for our purposes because Schlatter conducts a modal qualification of divine agency as the result of which God is conceived of to be actively present before, and with, man. The culminating point of this mode of action is reached in that the mediator himself assumes humanity, is "historically located," and thus "stands before us as God's witness."<sup>168</sup> In Jesus man is confronted with "the totality of divine grace."<sup>169</sup> "Jesus has placed man before God and God to man; an I and a Thou interact here with one another and all external media fall."<sup>170</sup>

The universal scope of Christ's work already came to the fore in Schlatter's understanding of God's saving agency. Schlatter insists on not limiting Christ's work to the removal of human sinfulness and the restoration of man's *status integritatis*. Christ is not merely a scapegoat.<sup>171</sup> Rather, God's original purpose with man is realised through Christ who, in reconciling man with God, establishes the community of faith so that through him

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<sup>165</sup> Jesus und Paulus, 84; cf. *Dogma*, 340-41; *Theologie der Apostel*, 337 where Schlatter states that "all activity of God upon the heavenly and earthly world takes place through Christ." Köstenbergers rendering suppresses the mediatorial thrust of the German original when he translates: "The focus of all of God's heavenly and earthly activity on Christ . . ." (*Theology of the Apostles*, 254). Through the term "organ" Schlatter wants to indicate that he does not understand Christ to be an inanimate tool through which God actualises his actions. For Schlatter's notion of "organ" see above, p. 24 n. 48.

<sup>166</sup> *Paulus der Bote*, 255, 256 (in above order).

<sup>167</sup> *Johannes*, 5; see also *Kennen wir Jesus?*, 161-62.

<sup>168</sup> *Dogma*, 353.

<sup>169</sup> *Theology of the Apostles*, 254-55.

<sup>170</sup> *Jesus und Paulus*, 104.

<sup>171</sup> See e.g. Schlatter's essay "Ist Jesus ein Sündenbock?".

the Kingdom of God has come.<sup>172</sup> On these grounds Christ's mediatorship extends to all divine actions through which God relates himself to the world as the one from whom, through whom and to whom everything has its being.

'For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.' [1Tim 2:5]. This passage . . . towers high above that which the Reformation dogma has read in the New Testament. It thought of Jesus' mediatorship only because we are guilty. Paul has never forgotten this either and therefore he describes the glory of Christ by saying that he [Christ] gave himself as ransom. Paul, however, never viewed Christ merely as the restorer of our fall, but calls him 'the mediator' because *the whole work of God happens through him*, not only his forgiving but also his creating. In order to understand why Paul called Christ the mediator, we must understand what he says about God our Creator (emphasis A. L.).<sup>173</sup>

The limits of our study force us to leave aside many of the exegetical and material details of Schlatter's outline and focus on the main aspects.<sup>174</sup> Christ is not only the mediator of salvation but also of God's creative, providential and perfecting agency "who invests us with the being-from God and the being-to God."<sup>175</sup> On the basis of Col 1:15-17 Schlatter states: "Everything has been created in him, thus also has its abiding subsistence and aim in him, and everything is created for his sake in order that it be his possession and receive life and glory from him, thus manifesting his Sonship."<sup>176</sup> In other words, Christ's mediatorial action is ontologically the enabling ground of the first as well as the second creation, the community of faith:

Because the community of the Son with the Father precedes everything which God let spring forth through him, he [the Son] is also the one who gives duration, force and effective power [*Wirkungsmacht*] to all things. Because he subsists they subsist; because he lives they are alive; be-

<sup>172</sup> See e.g. *Dogma*, 80-81, 280; *Gründe*, 60, 65.

<sup>173</sup> *Erlebtes*, 74.

<sup>174</sup> The exegetical basis are those New Testament passages in which the full participation in God's eternal being is ascribed to Jesus. The Johannine term "Word of God" and the Pauline term "image of God" are most important in this context. "The completeness of the One's communion with Jesus" resulted in the "pronouncement that God had accomplished the creative work and ruled over all things through him" (*Theology of the Apostles*, 28 with reference to Jn 1:3; 1Co 8:6; Col 1:17; Heb 1:2; see also *ibid.*, 366). For Schlatter's linking of the term "image of God" with Gen 1:25.26 see *Paulus der Bote*, 256; *Theology of the Apostles*, 254-55, 308-09; *Erläuterungen II*, 659.

<sup>175</sup> *Paulus der Bote*, 255.

<sup>176</sup> *Theology of the Apostles*, 307; cf. *ibid.*, 133-35, 307-09; "Wort," 830; "Wort und Schrift," 32.

cause he rules them they enjoy God's government. The one who separates himself from him obliterates the root of his life.<sup>177</sup>

Consequently, Schlatter places nature and history under the governance of Christ as that which is "created and ordered in Christ."<sup>178</sup>

It does not come unexpectedly when Schlatter also ascribes the three dimensions of divine agency to Christ who, as the divine Word, mediates this agency to creation. He concludes his exegesis of Jn 1:1-4 as follows: "ἔγενε, ζωή and φῶς make an ascending line. The subsistence of all things is the effect of the Word. Higher than subsistence is vivacity [*Lebendigkeit*], and the highest is the light whereby life is invested with the conscious, knowing inwardness [*Innerlichkeit*]."<sup>179</sup>

## B. The mediation of divine action through the Spirit

The work of the second mediator of the divine grace is also of universal scope: all divine acts towards and in the world happen through the Spirit of God.<sup>180</sup> Compared with his outline of the scope of christological mediation, Schlatter's explicit remarks on the pneumatological mediation of divine agency are terse. He links the acting of the Holy Spirit with the miracles that occurred in the history of Israel.<sup>181</sup> Further, as we saw above, inspiration is the work of the Holy Spirit through which God's word and will are revealed to man. Interesting in this connection is that Schlatter ascribes all knowledge of God, even that which is derived from nature, as God's creation, to the mediating agency of the Holy

<sup>177</sup> *Erläuterungen II*, 661; cf. *Paulus der Bote*, 255-56; *Erläuterungen III*, 188-92. See also what we have said about the christological grounding of Schlatter's notion of man as *simul creatus et peccator* (above, p. 62).

<sup>178</sup> *Dogma*, 340-41. Regarding Israel's history see *Paulus der Bote*, 289-90; regarding Christ's heavenly reign see e.g. *Theology of the Apostles*, 365-68; *Dogma*, 341-43; *Erläuterungen II*, 559-60.

<sup>179</sup> *Johannes*, 7; cf. what we outlined about the three dimensions of divine action above, especially the quotation on p. 109 n. 78.

<sup>180</sup> See *Paulus der Bote*, 288; *Theologie des NT I*, 478.

<sup>181</sup> See *Paulus der Bote*, 288-89.

Spirit.<sup>182</sup> A hint that Schlatter ties up divine providential action with the work of the Holy Spirit can be seen in Schlatter's affirmation that there is – even for non-Christians – "an inwardly effective presence of God."<sup>183</sup>

Schlatter's central concern is to elucidate that the mediation of the Holy Spirit stands for a mode of divine agency in which God is continuously and creatively present and active in man. This idea underlies not only Schlatter's concept of salvation and inspiration<sup>184</sup> but his whole outline of the work of the Holy Spirit.

Through the historical work of Christ the divine grace places itself before us and makes itself visible to us in the one, who through his Sonship and rule, is set above us. Through the Spirit, however, the divine activity [*Wirkung*] is laid into our own inner life [*Innenleben*]; he reveals the divine grace to us on our own inner condition.<sup>185</sup>

When Schlatter accentuates the immanent dimension of the activity of the Holy Spirit he does not mean to undermine the transcendent aspect of divine action. Rather, the operation of the Spirit is marked by God's creative power – and therefore sovereign and free. The Spirit works "in the full majesty of divine acting which is creatively supreme to man and nature"<sup>186</sup> for which reason neither the acting subject nor the act as such is perceivable but remains a mystery. Schlatter articulates this in the form of a modal analogy between the *creatio originalis* and the *creatio nova*.

[T]he creative moment, in which the shaping force of the Spirit grips us, is concealed from our observation. We do not perceive our being-caused [*Bewirktwerden*] by God. With the work of the Spirit it is the same as with the establishment of our natural life: the first thing that happens takes place without us, not only without our co-operation but also without our knowing; it has already happened before we perceive and do the will of the Spirit."<sup>187</sup>

<sup>182</sup> See Schlatter's reflections on Ps 19 in *Dogma*, 371.

<sup>183</sup> *Sprechstunde*, 10. See also *Ethik*, 261 (God rules us "through nature and history, through the Christ and the Spirit") and *Gründe*, 71 (the Spirit as . . . the medium of his [God's] royal rule").

<sup>184</sup> See especially the citations above, p. 83 n. 313; p. 103 nn. 56, 59.

<sup>185</sup> *Gründe*, 69; similarly *ibid.*, 71; *Dogma*, 343, 352-53; *Jesus und Paulus*, 103, 105, 108.

<sup>186</sup> *Jesus und Paulus*, 105.

<sup>187</sup> *Dogma*, 350-51. We briefly touched on Schlatter's linking of the Spirit with the divine creative power and the resulting incomprehensibility of the creative act, above, pp. 84, 103. Further references are *Dogma*, 462; *Gründe*, 71; *Opfer*, 24; "Glaube und Geschichte," 347; "Jesus und wir heutigen Menschen," 212; "Fröhlichs Traktat," 280-81; "Wort und Schrift," 33; *Ruf Jesu*, 318.

The activity of the Holy Spirit in man is also creative with regard to its scope and potency. "The boundaries, which limit that which is possible for us, do not exist for the creative grace of God which, through the Spirit, is not only effective for us but also in us."<sup>188</sup> We are confronted, Schlatter expounds, with the "highest manifestation of grace," with "God's perfect grace" which effects man's inner life in its "unity" and "totality."<sup>189</sup> Therefore, the creative activity of the Holy Spirit in man must not be thought of in synergistic terms.<sup>190</sup>

The main point of Schlatter's understanding of the work accomplished by the Holy Spirit in man is the creation of the new man who lives in personal communion of faith in, and love for, God. Man is made a child of God, and this is not the result of an organic development, of an evolutionary process immanent in the human creature.<sup>191</sup> Yet, as we have so often seen to be the case in Schlatter, to speak of a creative act in this context only makes sense if the object of action is not annihilated but truly created, enabled and empowered. Thus, the Holy Spirit is God's creative presence in whom man receives his whole life from God, that is, appropriates the divine gifts which are mediated through Christ. Everything which marks the human person as the image of God now receives its content from God. Man is renewed in his thinking, willing and acting – the Spirit is "the *Bildner* of the person."<sup>192</sup>

Precisely by proclaiming to us the Spirit as God's gift, God is witnessed to us as person, and because his creative work happens in the Spirit, it builds persons. That God gives Spirit means that he forms our personhood so that our thinking and willing stems from a divine root. With this, however, the Spirit affirms and sanctifies also the law of our whole personal life, namely that nothing becomes our own except through us, that no motive moves me unless I seize it, that no truth convinces me unless I

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<sup>188</sup> *Ethik*, 53;

<sup>189</sup> See *Gründe*, 70-71; *Jesus und Paulus*, 105.

<sup>190</sup> See e.g. *Dogma*, 351, 371.

<sup>191</sup> See e.g. *ibid.*, 344, *Gründe*, 71.

<sup>192</sup> *Jesus und Paulus*, 105; cf. "Wort und Schrift," 33; *Kennen wir Jesus?*, 50; *Ruf Jesu*, 317.

believe it, and that nothing becomes my property unless I appropriate it. Therefore, we are persons, and the Spirit is not a natural power but Spirit, and his work is the gift of life.<sup>193</sup>

The work of the Holy Spirit is therefore not established at the expense of human creatureliness. "The activity of the Holy Spirit grips our personal life in its unity. It does not cut off our natural functions, does not replace them. Rather, the full range of our natural vivacity is preserved, wanted and used by the Spirit. His gift does not replace the psychical processes but produces them."<sup>194</sup> The Spirit affirms, preserves and vivifies man – indeed, restores and perfects him.

According to Schlatter, this pneumatological orientation towards the particular identity of man in his otherness to God is most clearly displayed in the toppling of human sinfulness and the enabling of man to actively relate to, and act towards, God. "Therefore, the work of the Spirit is the active man who, through the Spirit, has gained the eager and active use of all his forces – now, however, in such a way that he no longer turns them against God – thereby uselessly wasting them – but uses them for God."<sup>195</sup> The Holy Spirit empowers man to live his life in the service of, and as a sacrifice to, God, offering in faith what has previously been received from God.<sup>196</sup> This does not happen, as Schlatter emphatically underlines, through some kind of arbitrary and coercive power but through God's love: "Love is above all the *Pneumatische*, 1Co 13, that which through God's Spirit is poured out into the heart of the believer, Ro 5:5."<sup>197</sup> It is this creative love, the gift of the

<sup>193</sup> "Sünde gegen den heiligen Geist," 75. For Schlatter's refusal to understand the agency of the Holy Spirit in the sense of a causality of a natural force see also *Jesus und Paulus*, 107-08; *Theology of the Apostles*, 368-72.

<sup>194</sup> *Dogma*, 348; cf. *ibid*, 348-51, 588-89; *Gründe*, 70-71; *Ruf Jesu*, 317-18; *Sprechstunde*, 48.

<sup>195</sup> *Dogma*, 350.

<sup>196</sup> See e.g. the section "The Sacrifice effected by the Spirit" in *Opfer*, 13-24; "Noch ein Wort," 95. Concerning the sacrifice of human corporeity, Schlatter states in his exegesis of Ro 12:1-8: "The bodies are yielded to God as his possession. The selfish use of the body, heeding its desires, ceases (6:13). This originates a new sacrifice that could not previously be brought to God, for this sacrifice is living and is not marked as God's possession by being killed."

<sup>197</sup> *Glaube*, 371.

Holy Spirit, which moves and empowers man no longer to live for himself but to love God and neighbour. "In perceiving God's love and receiving its gift we are liberated from the binding to ourselves, and instead will that which God wills, direct our desires to God's work and kingdom, and use the gifts of his love for him; we consequently act in love toward him."<sup>198</sup> The following sentences underline Schlatter's linking of God's Spirit and the divine love once more as a crucial aspect of his theory of divine action:

Every act which directs us with consciousness and will towards God, is effected by the Spirit. With this insight we step onto the path of the Apostle who calls love that which is, in the highest sense, the Spiritual [*das im höchsten Sinne Geistliche*]. This is because through this love everything in us – thinking, willing, acting – receives its determination [*Bestimmtheit*] from God.<sup>199</sup>

Schlatter explicates the work of the Holy Spirit as the realisation of God's purpose with man. The personal relationship of faith and love is the completion of man's *imago Dei* which Schlatter articulates as the gracious transformation of man into the image of Christ.<sup>200</sup> Now the human creature is truly from God and to God, and this is, according to Schlatter, not only the fulfilment of human life but also the fulfilment of God's being and action in relation to man.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> *Ethik*, 119; cf. especially *Jesus und Paulus*, 106; *Gründe*, 71; *Ruf Jesu*, 318; "Wort und Schrift," 33; *Dogma*, 509-12. Illuminating in this context is Rieger's outline of Schlatter's "battle for love" in *Rechtfertigungslehre*, 380-97.

<sup>199</sup> "Noch ein Wort," 120; cf. *Kennen wir Jesus?*, 468-69.

<sup>200</sup> See *Dogma*, 344, 351; *Ethik*, 119. The full meaning of this will come through in our exploration of Schlatter's christology and his idea of the church as the image of God. A. Torrance, albeit without explicit reference to the Holy Spirit, develops a notion of the "new creation" which is very similar to Schlatter's thought: "[T]he 'new creation' is *creation* in truth, that is, creation whereby, in completion of his eternal creative purpose, God penetrates into the inner structures of creaturely existence and, in and through his creative presence, transforms the connective matrices of the human order from the inside, to the extent that they have become dysfunctional and thus distortive of the full realisation of God's creative intentions. And the metaphor of the New Humanity confirms that the New Creation is specifically creation in the Second Adam and, as such, fulfils and completes God's creative purposes for communion" ("*Creatio ex Nihilo*," 102; emphasis Torrance).

<sup>201</sup> See *Opfer*, 24.



### C. The three persons of the Trinity and the three dimensions of divine action

In the foregoing sections we saw the reappearance of the different dimensions of divine agency. Earlier in our study we already sensed that Schlatter assigns each of these dimensions to the respective person of the Trinity.<sup>202</sup> We can now specify this assignment as being grounded in Schlatter's understanding of the mediation of divine agency through Christ and the Spirit. Through Christ, the activity of God takes place within the created sphere of nature and history. God acts in the presence of man. Through the Holy Spirit, the activity of God takes place in man. God transforms man from inside and empowers him to live according to the divine will and purpose.<sup>203</sup> The linking of each of the divine persons with the respective facet of divine agency is explicitly and most clearly stated in the following passage:

Here is a place where an insight into the inner divine being is possible for us. For in Jesus it is not only divine acting, divine speaking, and divine acts issuing from God which generate effects in the world. Rather, divine life gives itself existence within the world; a divine 'I' makes itself perceivable in a human 'I'. There we stand before the empirical moment which gives our conception of God [*Gottesanschauung*] its trinitarian form. Even the doctrine of the Trinity has an empirical basis. It rests upon the threeness of the divine activities [*Wirkungen*] as they bring about the institution of the kingdom [of God] within history. We are confronted with an omni-activity [*Allwirksamkeit*] of God which penetrates the whole event and which has its point of origin outside and above the same; with an activity of God which has its point of origin in the God-human 'I' of Jesus, and, finally, with an activity of God which has its point of origin in the inner sphere of human personalities as the Spirit of God incorporated in them, as we encountered this activity of God in the prophets. Indeed, this threeness of the divine mode of existence has in itself the witness of unity, but also of truth and can therefore not be dismissed through the category of appearance but points back to a triune definedness of being [*Wesensbestimmtheit*] in God. God is that as which he appears, and the revealed Trinity [*Offenbarungs-trinität*] witnesses to the ontological Trinity [*Wesenstrinität*].<sup>204</sup>

<sup>202</sup> See above, p. 108 n. 75.

<sup>203</sup> In addition to our exposition of this distinction see also Neuer, *Zusammenhang*, 205-06.

<sup>204</sup> \**Wesen und Quellen*, 158. In the same way Schlatter structures his outline of "the triune name of God" in *Ruf Jesu*, 312-19. Cf. Gunton's articulation of the three "modes of the transcendence of God. The Father is transcendent as the fount of all being, both God's and the world's: a transcendence of origination. The Son is the mode of God's immanence in the world, in which he is witness not to himself, but to the Father. The Spirit is God's eschatological transcendence, his futurity, as it is sometimes expressed. He is God present to the world as its liberating other, bringing it to the destiny determined by the Father, made actual, realised in the Son" ("The Spirit in the Trinity," 130).

## 5. Concluding Observations on the Conceptual Capacity of Schlatter's Theory

The task that remains for us is to secure the results of our study thus far in such a way as to ask critically whether or not Schlatter is able to provide adequate solutions for the problems of a theory of divine action as we outlined them at the outset of this chapter.

### A. Features of a modal ontology of divine action

#### i. God's action as the ontological enabling-ground of human being and action

Already Walldorf has briefly hinted at the parallels between Schlatter's concept of divine action and the notion of a "modal theory of divine action" as developed by Christoph Schwöbel.<sup>205</sup> The latter explains:

Everything that is would have to be interpreted as being made either possible or necessary 'by God' so that 'by God' would have to be understood as 'constituted by God's action'. God would have to be conceived as the by itself possible and necessary ground of all worldly being and occurrences in such a way that 'by itself' designates the self-constitutive character of divine agency.<sup>206</sup>

#### a) Divine omni-activity, the creative act and the ontology of giving

The idea of God's omnicausality is a central constituent of Schlatter's understanding of divine agency: God's omni-activity (*Allwirksamkeit*) is conceived of as the ontological enabling-ground of creaturely being and action – for which reason everything is from God and to God as "the one who works everything in all men."<sup>207</sup> Schlatter captures the onto-constitutive character of divine agency in the term "creative". In his idea of God's "creative act" Schlatter consistently interprets divine action in an ontological sense, thereby defining the transcendental aspect of divine agency. It is precisely for reason of establishing a

<sup>205</sup> See Walldorf, *Realistische Philosophie*, 180-81, 188.

<sup>206</sup> Schwöbel, *God: Action and Revelation*, 42.

<sup>207</sup> See "Wandel nach dem Geist," 25 with reference to 1Cor 12:6.

strong conceptual ground for the onto-constitutive dynamic of divine agency that Schlatter equips his concept of divine efficacy with a modal specification: Divine action is personal action, grace, and love.<sup>208</sup> For he is convinced that a naturalistic or mechanistic understanding of divine efficacy subversively undermines the true creativity of divine agency. Hence, Schlatter presents us with a modal ontology of divine action, that is, with an ontology of God's grace and love. And because he continuously defines divine personal action, grace and love as operations in which God gives good gifts, it is indeed appropriate to speak of an ontology of giving. Von Lüpke has – albeit in a different context – just recently confirmed our interpretation of Schlatter's thought: "One could speak of an ontology of gift and in this way express the fact that Schlatter attempts to answer the question about being, the question about actuality [*Wirklichkeit*], on the basis of the actuality of God's gift."<sup>209</sup>

b) The orientation of God's action towards the particular and the other

Integral to Schlatter's modal ontology of divine action is the idea that divine agency is oriented towards man in his particularity and otherness vis-à-vis God. The conceptual function of this is to secure the onto-constitutive character of divine action. The actional orientation towards the other underlies not only the act of *creatio originalis*, through which God brings forth somebody *other* than Godself, but also the divine actions which follow this initial act. God actively and creatively affirms, enables, and establishes human life,

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<sup>208</sup> This affirms Walldorf's suggestion that – on the whole – it appears "to make more sense to interpret Schlatter's concept of divine efficacy [*Wirken*] by means of the model of personal action in which the concept of action is understood as an ontological fundamental category" (*Realistische Philosophie*, 180 n. 62). Cf. Rieger, *Rechtfertigungslehre*, 416: "For God does not act as impersonal world cause [*Weltgrund*] or primary cause [*Erstursache*] but in personal-creative encounter."

<sup>209</sup> von Lüpke, "Gottes Gaben wahrnehmen," 289 where the author argues that different motives of Schlatter's theology come together in the concept of gift. Similarly Dintaman, who tries to establish the thesis that "the creativity of God functions as an internal dynamic, sometimes explicit though more often unspoken, which shapes Schlatter's thinking about various issues related to faith and history" (*Creative Grace*, 25; see further pp. 24-27, 151-162).

that is, human being and action, in all its creaturely concreteness and distinctness. In this context, Schlatter's notion of *concursum divinum* must be seen as the culminating point of his concept.

We have seen above that Schlatter grounds the orientation of divine agency towards human particularity and otherness in the personal mode of divine action, in God's grace and love. God *wills* there to be human persons – homogeneous selves capable of free and self-determined action. It is in the outgoingness of his grace and love that he moves actively and creatively beyond himself, establishing and empowering man as personal other. We perceive this to be the point at which Schlatter's ontology of love and giving leads to the idea that God creates history.<sup>210</sup> When the personal Creator creates a personal creature, then history is the adequate way in which God relates to man. God's love creates time and space in order that man can grow in knowledge of God and enter into communion with him.<sup>211</sup> Through the interrelation and interaction with God, fellow man and the rest of creation, man becomes the particular person God intends him to be.

[T]he generation of the historically and individually determined life is that event through which the real comes into being and the effective powers come about. History exclusively and continuously brings forth the particular [*Einzelnes*], which comes about through the concatenation [*Verkettung*] of events and which happens only once. *Through this, history does not become the game of vain shadows, but is exactly in this form [Gestalt] the work of God and the revelation of his inexhaustible life* (emphasis A. L.).<sup>212</sup>

<sup>210</sup> For this movement from divine personal action, grace and love to the creation of history see "Heilige Geschichte," 216-17.

<sup>211</sup> See *Erläuterungen I*, 978.

<sup>212</sup> *Dogma*, 284; similarly in *Ethik*, 150; "Wort und Schrift," 28, 29 ("the divine activity that creates history"), 32 ("[God] who creates history through the wave [*Wink*] of his almighty hand"); \**Schöpfung und Offenbarung*, 5; \**Philosophie und Christentum*, 37-38. On account of these statements, Luck's conclusion must be affirmed: "Schlatter sees the special feature of the Christian understanding of God in that God, through his agency, does not break history but works history" ("Introduction *Zur Theologie*," 19). See further Bockmühl, "Wahrnehmung," 96-107; Dintaman, *Creative Grace*, 105-19.

In Schlatter, God is the "subject of history;" history is the place of *Heilsgeschichte*, of those acts through which God realises and reaches his purposes with man and creation.<sup>213</sup> When Schlatter speaks of *Heilsgeschichte* as "a system of the divine deeds"<sup>214</sup> he is not concerned with the development of an all-comprehensive and "interpretive theory concerning God's plan for the world."<sup>215</sup> Schlatter rather wants to outline the faithfulness and continuity in which God acts in order to reach his purposes with man. It is because of this continuity that God has to be conceived of as being actively and creatively at work in the here and now.

[T]he sacred history, which the eternal God has brought about, is not past; it forms rather, with eternal power, the basis out of which that new act of God which now rules, humbles, quickens and redeems us. With the present God the divine work remains also present to us; with the Christ being with us his saving deed [*Heilandstat*] is also with us. . . . The sacred history is not merely a collection of examples of great and true thoughts, but is the life-creating power. Between that which God once did, and does today, and one day shall do, there reigns a causal connection of the strongest and most powerful form.<sup>216</sup>

God's actional orientation towards human particularity and otherness also comes to the fore when we recapitulate Schlatter's understanding of the three dimensions or facets of divine action. God's efficacy becomes more and more concrete. God and man come, so to speak, closer and closer when God acts upon, with and through man.<sup>217</sup> Since Schlatter links the threefold dimensionality with the trinitarian mediation of divine action through Christ and the Spirit, it comes as no surprise that the outgoing dynamic of God's creative and giving action finds its fullest expression in Schlatter's understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit. In the different pneumatological sections above we saw that Schlatter conceives of God's Spirit as the creative Spirit in whom divine agency reaches its highest level

<sup>213</sup> \**Dogmatik* I, 53; see also Neuer, "Verständnis von Geschichte," 47-49.

<sup>214</sup> See our outline of Schlatter's understanding of God's agency as intentional action above, pp. 114-115.

<sup>215</sup> *Theology of the Apostles*, 261; cf. what we have said above about Schlatter's critique of *Denkreligion*, p. 128 n. 159. See also Güting, "Voraussetzungen," 147 n. 80; Yarbrough, *The heilsgeschichtliche Perspektive*, 52-54.

<sup>216</sup> "Heilige Geschichte," 227.

<sup>217</sup> This idea occurs in Baader, *Sämtliche Werke*, X, 334-35.

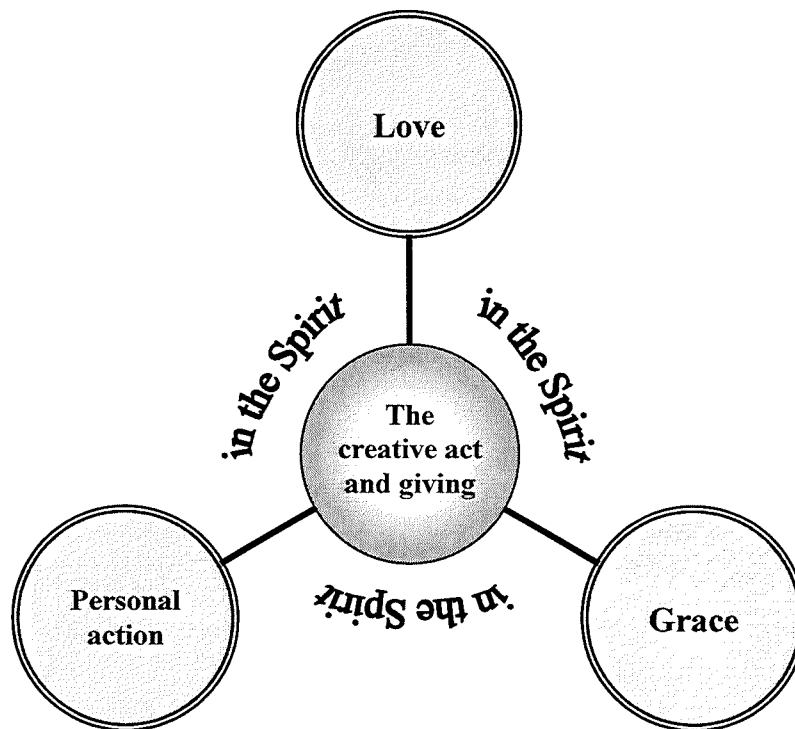
of concreteness, particularity and presence. We may say that Schlatter's ontology of love and giving assumes a pneumatological character because the Spirit is "for our present time the final and most supreme work of God" in which we see God's "communicating life as it is turned towards the world [*sein der Welt sich zuwendendes und mitteilendes Leben*]." <sup>218</sup> Hence, what applies to God's agency in general, applies especially to the work of the Holy Spirit: he creates history.

[H]e [God in his Spirit] creates history – history as the mutually conditioned life and relationships that are joined together to form a community; history as the joining of life into a chain of tradition which continues to form subsequent life. This does not entail a belittling of the work and power of the Spirit, but is precisely that which the Spirit wills and works. <sup>219</sup>

In sum: God's creative and giving efficacy is modally qualified as personal action, grace and love. Divine agency is always upon, with and through man, an orientation towards the human person in its particularity and otherness which could be expressed in the phrase "*actio pro nobis*." The Holy Spirit is the mediator of this creative and outgoing agency. The following table constitutes an attempt to capture the interrelation and interchangeability of these different concepts and terms as they constitute Schlatter's modal ontology of divine action. Without claiming to be complete, it seeks to provide the most crucial references to those passages in which the interrelations visualised in the graphic are most striking.

<sup>218</sup> "Wort und Schrift," 33; \**Genesis*, 21 (in above order).

<sup>219</sup> *Dogma*, 368.



	References	Key Words
<b>Creative act and giving</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Sprechstunde</i>, 56</li> <li>• <i>Theology of the Apostles</i>, 362</li> <li>• <i>Gründe</i>, 29</li> <li>• <i>Metaphysik</i>, 87</li> <li>• "Paulus und das Griechentum," 135</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the creative and giving God</li> <li>• God's operations, good gifts</li> <li>• God's causing is giving; his will is goodness</li> <li>• good and giving will</li> <li>• [God's] gift founds, moves and completes our whole existence</li> </ul>
<b>Creative act, giving and personal action</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Letzte Bitte Jesu," 328</li> <li>• <i>Erläuterungen I</i>, 604</li> <li>• <i>Andachten</i>, 417</li> <li>• "Jesus und wir heutigen Menschen," 209</li> <li>• "Zweifel an der Messianität," 196</li> <li>•</li> <li>• *<i>Dogmatik I</i>, 195-96</li> <li>• <i>Dogma</i>, 123-24</li> <li>•</li> <li>• <i>Dogma</i>, 437</li> <li>• <i>Opfer</i>, 3</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the will that gives because it is love</li> <li>• the Word, creative act</li> <li>• [God's] Word is the creative power</li> <li>• God's will, creative power</li> <li>• the giving will, who creates life and gives will</li> <li>• the creative Word</li> <li>• divine thinking and speaking, creative power, plastic force, Word</li> <li>• creative righteousness</li> <li>• the giving and creative will of God</li> </ul>

<b>Creative act, giving, and grace</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Sollen wir gegen unsere Sünde kämpfen," 90</li> <li>• "Noch ein Wort," 100</li> <li>• "Theology of the New Testament and Dogmatics," 199</li> <li>• "Natur, Sünde und Gnade," 65</li> <li>• "Wille," 827</li> <li>• "Schätzung der Individualität," 127</li> <li>• <i>Opfer</i>, 14</li> <li>• <i>Sprechstunde</i>, 67</li> <li>• <i>Andachten</i>, 296</li> <li>• "Wunder der Bibel," 79; <i>Opfer</i>, 48;</li> <li>• <i>Kennen wir Jesus</i>, 389-90</li> <li>• <i>Sprechstunde</i>, 9</li> <li>• <i>Gründe</i>, 52</li> <li>• "Wir Christen und die Juden," 9-10</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• grace gives</li> <li>• grace seeks and creates</li> <li>• God's creating and giving, work of grace</li> <li>• creative grace, the giving God</li> <li>• God's grace gives because he is good</li> <li>• the gracious, giving will of God</li> <li>• giving grace</li> <li>• God's grace, God's giving will</li> <li>• almighty goodness</li> <li>• almighty grace</li> <li>• the omnipotence of grace</li> <li>• God's almighty creative grace</li> <li>• the creative intervention of the divine grace</li> <li>• grace, free giving goodness, gift</li> </ul>
<b>Creative act, giving, and love</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Kennen wir Jesus</i>, 218</li> <li>• <i>Paulus, der Bote</i>, 419</li> <li>• "Weihnachtsansprache," 64</li> <li>• "Letzte Bitte Jesu," 337</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• love, creative power</li> <li>• love, giving will</li> <li>• God is love; He, the creative will</li> <li>• God is love in effective, love-creating force</li> </ul>
<b>Personal action, grace and love</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Kennen wir Jesus</i>, 39</li> <li>• <i>Erläuterungen III</i>, 155-56</li> <li>• "Bedeutung des Denkens," 326</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Liebeswille</i></li> <li>• love, divine will</li> <li>• grace is giving will</li> </ul>
<b>Creative love, creative grace and Holy Spirit</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Evangelium und Bekenntnis," 22</li> <li>• <i>Ethik</i>, 53</li> <li>• <i>Gründe</i>, 71</li> <li>• <i>Dogma</i>, 371</li> <li>• "Glaube und Geschichte," 347</li> <li>• <i>Jesus und Paulus</i>, 105</li> <li>• <i>Dogma</i>, 350-51</li> <li>• "Sünde gegen den Heiligen Geist," 75; "Jesus und wir heutigen Menschen," 212</li> <li>• <i>Opfer</i>, 24</li> <li>• <i>Einleitung</i>, 480</li> <li>• <i>Dienst</i>, 78</li> <li>• "Wandel nach dem Geist," 15</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• grace, omnipotence of the creative love</li> <li>• God's creative grace, Spirit</li> <li>• creative act, Spirit, creative grace</li> <li>• creative giving, Spirit, creative power of grace</li> <li>• God's finger which creates life and faith</li> <li>• Spirit of God, majesty of divine acting, creatively supreme</li> <li>• the creative moment, the shaping force of the Spirit</li> <li>• creative work, Spirit</li> <li>• Spirit, miracle of becoming, the Creator-hand, the creative finger of God</li> <li>• God's Spirit creates, he fills man with God's gifts</li> <li>• grace, efficacy of the Holy Spirit, giving</li> <li>• God's will, grace, God's gift, Spirit</li> </ul>



ii. The conceptual employment of the metaphysical attributes of God

It is interesting to observe that we do not find a separate and coherent doctrine of God's being in Schlatter's dogmatics. Rather, he outlines the doctrine of God continuously, and in strong connection with, God's actions and works.<sup>220</sup> Without going into greater detail, Schlatter's reasons for this method lie in his awareness of a theological self-contradiction which emerges on the material level of dogmatics. We have mentioned this in the introductory chapter of this thesis.<sup>221</sup> However, what primarily interests us at this stage is this: In the few passages in which Schlatter refers to the so-called metaphysical attributes of God, he makes conceptual use of the metaphysical attributes in such a way as to qualify how God's creative and giving agency is established and takes place in the world.<sup>222</sup> We shall now demonstrate this interpretation on the basis of Schlatter's thoughts about divine omnipotence and omnipresence.

a) Omnipotence

Our exposition of Schlatter's understanding of divine causality has made it sufficiently clear that, according to him, God's omnipotence must not be understood in the sense of a natural force for which everything is possible. God's omnipotence is *personal* power, for which reason Schlatter speaks of the omnipotence of *grace* and *love*. This means that Schlatter does not impose an *a priori* and abstract idea of omnipotence upon his concept of divine action. Rather, the idea of divine omnipotence is – as far as we can see – derived

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<sup>220</sup> For an in-depth analysis of this see Neuer, *Zusammenhang*, 55-64.

<sup>221</sup> See above, p. 9.

<sup>222</sup> For an elucidating discussion of the issues at stake here see Schwöbel, *God: Action and Revelation*, 38-42, 50-62.

from the actual disclosure of God's power in his actions.<sup>223</sup> We could articulate Schlatter's notion of omnipotence in the phrase, *potentia ordinata gratiae et caritatis*.<sup>224</sup> As Schlatter makes clear with regard to the events in the history of Israel, we are not just dealing with any omnipotence but with "the omnipotence of a Father who calls his sons to himself and redeems and preserves them in order that they stand in his community and service."<sup>225</sup> This omnipotence of the divine love is, according to Schlatter, the power by which God constitutes and enables human being and action, by which God – in creation, preservation, redemption and perfection – acts upon, with, in and through man in such a way as to reach his creative purpose for communion with man as personal other.

We conclude that the speech about God's omnipotence (*Allmacht*) and the correlating term *Allwirksamkeit* (omnicausality) serve Schlatter to give full expression to the ontological character of divine action.<sup>226</sup> Schlatter underlines that in such an understanding of God's omnipotence, the true power of God – in which he is creatively supreme to creation – is conceptually secured. "Even if we merely proceeded from the idea of power, the production and ruling of beings who are capable of themselves is incomparably greater

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<sup>223</sup> Schlatter's approach stands in line with those insights which, through Hermann Cremer's important book on God's attributes, have influenced the theological thinking of a number of protestant theologians: "All mistakes which are made in the discussion of God's omnipotence are linked to the fact that one does not begin with the actuality of the same [omnipotence] as it makes itself knowable and experiential to us through the self-actuation [*Selbstbetätigung*] of God in his revelation, but that one tries to gain its knowledge *a priori*" (Cremer, *Die Lehre von den Eigenschaften Gottes*, 83). For the positive reception of Cremer's book see Burkhardt's introduction, XIX.

<sup>224</sup> This must, however, not be understood in terms of a conflict in which God's love limits his power. Such a notion of divine self-limitation presupposes, again, an *a priori* concept of omnipotence.

<sup>225</sup> "Wunder," 832. Cf. Barth's view on the subject: "God's omnipotence is not some power that we might be inclined to regard as omnipotence. It is the power of the Father that does not make itself known to us as omnipotence *in abstracto* but only as the omnipotence of the Father, and that means – in the Father's revealing Himself to us" (*Credo*, 19; similarly in *Church Dogmatics* 2. 1, 524-25).

<sup>226</sup> See also Schwöbel, who conceives of omnipotence "as the specific mode in which God makes the being and processes of the world possible and necessary" (*God: Action and Revelation*, 42).

than the generation of nullities. For God reveals his power precisely in creating the real, not merely the apparition; those who will, not merely machines."<sup>227</sup>

#### b) Omnipresence

At different places we saw that Schlatter relates God's creative and giving agency with God's presence. A case in point is Schlatter discussion of God's providential action: the life of the creature is dependent upon God's presence in creation. The sinner remains God's creature because God remains present with him.<sup>228</sup> Hence, Schlatter's ontological understanding of divine action with its emphasis on the actuality, concreteness and particularity of God's agency, requires a concept of God's continuous and universal presence. Indeed, Schlatter can identify both: "God's presence is creative activity and extends to everything."<sup>229</sup> Consequently, God's omnipresence is the way in which God creates and actively enables human existence in space and time: "Therefore, we call God omnipresent because our insertion in a space and in a moment in time is God's effect and because the divine causality does not separate itself from its effect but remains present in it."<sup>230</sup>

We have already mentioned that God's presence accommodates itself according to its object. As incomprehensible as "the being-in of the things in God and God's being in the things [*das Innesein der Dinge in Gott und Gottes in den Dingen*]"<sup>231</sup> may be, Schlatter argues that the way in which God is present in the things is different from the way in which

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<sup>227</sup> *Dogma*, 155.

<sup>228</sup> See e.g. *Ruf Jesu*, 323; *Dogma*, 226

<sup>229</sup> *Theology of the Apostles*, 28; see also "Heilige Geschichte," 227: "With the present God the divine work remains also present to us." The terms *Allgegenwart* and *Allwirksamkeit* occur together in "Letzte Bitte Jesu," 335. Again we observe an affinity to Schwöbel who understands omnipresence to "express the way in which God is present to all worldly occurrences as the ground of their possibility" (*God: Action and Revelation*, 42).

<sup>230</sup> *Dogma*, 49.

<sup>231</sup> See \**Wesen und Quellen*, 81.

he is present in the human person.<sup>232</sup> Schlatter distinguishes, in this context, between *Durchwohnung* (a dwelling through) and *Inwohnung* (a dwelling in).<sup>233</sup> The latter means a creative presence in man by which God constitutes and enables the processes of human consciousness and the personal functions of man. To take human thinking as an example: when God – through his thinking and willing – is with and in man, the result is that "we are known by God and at the same time knowing; the things are only known."<sup>234</sup> Thus, Schlatter speaks of "an inwardly effective presence of God" and specifies this pneumatologically as "the presence of the divine almighty grace with the human spirit," "the presence of God as the Spirit with our intellect."<sup>235</sup>

### iii. The conceptual integration of divine transcendence and divine relation to creation

We are now justified in arguing that, in Schlatter's modal ontology of God's gracious and loving action, divine transcendence and creative involvement with creation are constructively integrated. The basis for this lies in Schlatter's understanding of divine efficacy as personal action, grace and love. Far from being mere anthropomorphic speech about God, this notion of divine agency is precisely that which secures God's genuine transcendence as a constitutive and consistent feature of Schlatter's concept. For he does not de-

<sup>232</sup> See above, p. 33 n. 94.

<sup>233</sup> \**Dogmatik* I, 124; cf. Schlatter's reference to Baader above, p. 110 n. 80.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*; cf. *Dogma*, 337.

<sup>235</sup> *Sprechstunde*, 10; *Dogma*, 371; "Bedeutung des Denkens," 324 (in above order). See also "Bedeutung des Denkens," 325 and *Furcht vor dem Denken*, 17-18 where Schlatter speaks about "God's mild hand" which he "opens above our capacity to think" and "the closeness of God" which "also applies to our capacity to think." With these quotations we have touched upon Schlatter's idea that the Logos, through whom God called the world into being, constitutes the necessary condition for human thinking, self-knowledge, and knowledge of the world. "God's thought stands prior to all reality as its prius" (\**Dogmatik* I, 125). This ontological primacy of God's thinking and knowing renders human thinking a thinking-after God (*ein Nach-Denken Gottes*) for which reason Schlatter completes Descartes' famous dictum as follows: "*cogitor, ergo sum ergo cogito*" (\**Erkenntnislehre*, 46; similarly in *Dogma*, 99). For a profound outline of these thoughts see Walldorf, *Realistische Philosophie*, 133-41, 238-39. Schlatter's understanding of God's omniscience, to which he – as far as we are aware – never refers explicitly, would have to be interpreted along the above lines.

velop the transcendental aspect of divine agency in contrast to the non-divine but on the basis of God's own personhood, grace and love. In this context a couple of aspects deserve closer attention.

In Schlatter's concept God's creative action is completely self-constituted and self-regulated. As we have elaborated in the respective sections above, the factuality, modality and success of divine action are solely grounded in God's thinking and Word; in God's will as grace and love, and in the perfect interplay and unity of these with God's power. In this way Schlatter gives conceptual expression to the perfection of divine agency. On this basis Schlatter is able to uphold the notion that divine action is uncaused and unconditioned. Causality is, as Schlatter argues, not "a predicate of God's being," God is not "cause according to his being." There is no necessity or coercion which forces God to be efficacious, rather, "God wills to be cause."<sup>236</sup> Schlatter's specification of the divine will as pure love is the ultimate affirmation of the contingency of divine action.<sup>237</sup> Thus, the concept of divine agency as personal action, grace and love also provides a sufficient answer to the question of *regressus infinitus*. Schlatter argues that "[f]rom the abstractum of causality we should never infer that everything is caused, nothing uncaused, nothing only worker without being caused itself."<sup>238</sup> In other words, every cause has its effect and vice versa, but not every being is caused.<sup>239</sup> Consequently, there is no need for Schlatter to resolve the problem of *regressus infinitus* through a concept of God as *causa sui*. This is because he conceives God

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<sup>236</sup> \**Kritische Bemerkungen*, 19; similarly *ibid.*, 21.

<sup>237</sup> See above, p. 123. However, this idea requires a respective doctrine of the immanent Trinity. For if God's being is love, the idea is imminent to say that God's action of love *ad extra* is necessary for the actualisation or even realisation of his eternal being. How Schlatter resolves this issue shall concern below, pp. 244ff.

<sup>238</sup> *Dogma*, 28.

<sup>239</sup> Walldorf has brought to light that Schlatter works with a metaphysical concept of causality that differs from the physical or natural-philosophical law of causality (*Realistische Philosophie*, 169-81). The idea that every cause has its effect and vice versa is an analytical principle and has, in the sense of *causae sufficientis*, metaphysical validity. Yet, the notion that every being has its cause is induced from the experience and perception of creaturely contingency and, therefore, does not have absolute validity (see Schlatter's exposition of these thoughts in \**Kritische Bemerkungen*, 4-7).

as personal agent and divine efficacy as personal action. Put differently, to say that God wills to act in a certain way for a certain purpose sufficiently explains the origin of an event and makes the search for further causes unnecessary.<sup>240</sup>

The notion that God is able to create something other than himself is, according to Schlatter, based on the ideas just outlined. "If an act of will gives origin and goal to us and all that has being, then it is a creative act which brings forth the world . . ."<sup>241</sup> God's contingent act renders the world a "work" of God, which means that the world stands "vis-à-vis" God "as something which is distinguished from him although it exists solely through him."<sup>242</sup> The contingent act brings forth a contingent work.<sup>243</sup> The point to note for our purposes here is that the transcendental, that is, self-constitutive and contingent character of divine action does not contradict, but found, God's creative involvement with the world. This clarifies once more Schlatter's usage of the terms "creative grace" and "creative love" because they are highly capable of capturing both moments: the transcendence of God, who acts in the pure liberality of his grace and love, and the creative outgoingness of God, who acts *pro nobis*.

In a roundabout way, Schlatter's consistent ontological interpretation of divine action must be seen as the ultimate conceptual securing of God's transcendence. The ontological constitutive moment is the *differentia specifica* of divine action. The ontological founding relation is strictly asymmetrical and takes place exclusively from God towards the world,

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<sup>240</sup> For a similar argumentation see also Schwöbel, *God: Action and Revelation*, 37 and Kirkpatrick, "Understanding an Act of God," 171-74.

<sup>241</sup> *Metaphysik*, 88.

<sup>242</sup> \**Kritische Bemerkungen*, 19-20.

<sup>243</sup> For a definition of the term "contingent" with its different nuances see e.g. T. F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order*, vii-viii, 29-35; Gunton, *The Triune Creator*, 9-10, 112-13. The latter differentiates between *contingence* as the dependence of the creature on God and *contingency* as the freedom of the creature to be itself ("The End of Causality?," 68).

and not vice versa.<sup>244</sup> To understand all creaturely being and action as created and enabled by God's action means, therefore, a radical interpretation of divine transcendence.<sup>245</sup> The divine and the human are located on different levels for which reason they do not have to compete with each other. Yet, as soon as God's transcendence is no longer conceived to be at risk through his active involvement in the world, a theory of divine action exceeds the frame of reference in which the transcendental and immanent dimension of divine agency cancel each other out.

## **B. Towards a structural theory of divine action**

Our exposition of Schlatter's concept of divine action has repeatedly brought to our attention how he understands the relation between the different actions and works of God. In the following we seek to outline the fundamental distinctions of unity and distinctness; continuity and discontinuity, according to which Schlatter relates and structures the divine actions and works.

### **i. The unity of divine agency**

#### **a) Different dimensions – one agency**

In our study thus far we have laboured to demonstrate that, in Schlatter's view, the togetherness of the different facets or dimensions is characteristic of a divine act. Divine action is always multidimensional action. Thus, Schlatter can state that "each act of God has a totality of acting and working in itself."<sup>246</sup> When we recall that Schlatter a) links each of

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<sup>244</sup> See above, p. 97 n. 32.

<sup>245</sup> The phrase "radical interpretation of divine transcendence" is taken from Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity*, 2. Illuminating for our outline of Schlatter's approach is Tanner's exposition of radical transcendence in *God and Creation*, chapter 2, especially pp. 78-80.

<sup>246</sup> \**Christologie*, 4; similarly *ibid.*, i.

the three dimensions of divine action with the respective person of the Trinity and b) understands all divine actions as mediated through the Son and the Spirit, it appears only logical when Schlatter argues that every divine act takes place in a trinitarian way.

The gift of the Father founds the giving of the Son, this [founds] the giving of the Spirit. In turn, the work of the Spirit founds the giving of the Son and this [founds] the giving of the Father. The Father is the foundation as well as the goal of all acts that reveal him and he is without split and rupture in everything that is Christ's and the Spirit's.<sup>247</sup>

What we have here is Schlatter's conceptual application of the principle developed in the Augustinian tradition: *opera trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*.<sup>248</sup> This unity of divine agency does not exclude, as we have seen, the appropriation of certain actional aspects to a specific person of the Trinity so that certain works are conceived of as the specific work of one of the trinitarian persons.<sup>249</sup> Rather, what is excluded is that a work which is particularly ascribed to one person – for example, creation to the Father – can adequately be understood by eclipsing the participation of the two other persons. As Schlatter puts it, "the whole divine work participates in every occurrence."<sup>250</sup> Thus, a "separation of the divine work in the three Articles [of the Creed]" is obviated. "We are always dealing with the one God, the indivisible one, who is always completely that which he is."<sup>251</sup>

#### b) Different works – one history

If we draw out the lines of the foregoing a little further, we discover a second conceptual application of the principle *opera trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*. According to Schlatter, God is the one subject of his actions and works – for which reason they are internally

<sup>247</sup> *Dogma*, 352.

<sup>248</sup> For similar approaches see Härle, *Dogmatik*, 392-97; Schwöbel, "Trinitätslehre als Rahmentheorie," 40-41.

<sup>249</sup> For the notion of appropriation see Schmidbaur, *Gottes Handeln in Welt und Geschichte*, 527-28.

<sup>250</sup> *Ethik*, 296.

<sup>251</sup> \**Schöpfung und Offenbarung*, 5.



related. "Divine action unfolds itself in an ordered connection of acts, in a divine history. Therefore, it [divine action] sets itself in positive relation to time and is not placed beyond it as the timeless."<sup>252</sup> It is unnecessary to repeat how Schlatter conceptually derives the unity and continuity of this history from his notion of divine agency as personal action, grace and love. Suffice it here to say that the continuity of God's agency emerges because every act serves God's eternal purpose for a communion of faith and love with man – for which reason God's action constitutes not any *Geschichte* but precisely *Heilsgeschichte*.

[G]od is not only present and efficacious in single moments but in the whole course of history. His government is not temporarily suspended nor does it happen in leaps and impulses [*Sprüngen und Stößen*], but constitutes a whole in which the first beginning and the final completion are connected in a strong unity.<sup>253</sup>

Because of this homogeneous, intentional and eschatological directedness, the different divine actions and works must not be understood in contradictory terms; they must not be played out against each other.<sup>254</sup> Due to the limits of this study we must refrain from demonstrating how Schlatter explicates the continuity between all the single works of God. The crucial aspects can be demonstrated sufficiently by looking at the way in which Schlatter relates God's works of creation and salvation.<sup>255</sup>

Creation "is the basis of all acts of God which have happened – and will happen – in the world and for the world."<sup>256</sup> For Schlatter this means that all consecutive divine acts take the form of interaction so that God acts in faithfulness to his original purposes with the creature, that is, in propriety to the being and nature of his own creation.<sup>257</sup> Along these

<sup>252</sup> \**Christologie*, 38.

<sup>253</sup> "Neue Testament," 108; similarly in "Pforte zum Römerbrief," 67; "Heilige Geschichte," 222, 225, 227; "Gott der Patriarchen," 87; *Jesus und Paulus*, 11.

<sup>254</sup> See e.g. *Dogma*, 469; *Opfer*, 32.

<sup>255</sup> Aspects of the following are also discussed in Neuer, *Zusammenhang*, 209-11, 228-34; Rieger, *Rechtfertigungslehre*, 274-80, 348-53, 401-07.

<sup>256</sup> \**Schöpfung und Offenbarung*, 3a.

<sup>257</sup> See the section on immanent action above, p. 99.

lines Schlatter states: "Being man [*Menschsein*] is the presupposition of becoming Christian, according to the old rule: *fiunt, non nascuntur christiani*. We are born as human beings and become Christians through the encounter with Christ."<sup>258</sup> Salvation presupposes creation. However, because Schlatter has a teleological understanding of creation's goodness and perfection, "creation is a beginning which does not yet reveal the complete will of God."<sup>259</sup> This is to say that creation, and especially the creation of the human person, presupposes a *Heilsgeschichte* – further acts through which God works the perfection of the creature according to his purposes. Therefore, creation – in a certain way – presupposes salvation.<sup>260</sup> Schlatter articulates the mutual continuity between creation and salvation in nature-grace terminology: "Grace is not the slave of nature, yet it is neither its enemy, but its completer."<sup>261</sup> In this, Schlatter stands in line with the Thomistic axiom of "*Gratia non tollit naturam sed perfecit*."<sup>262</sup>

In the wake of the thoughts just outlined, Schlatter explicates the operations and the works which are specifically ascribed to Christ and the Spirit neither as the negation, nor as the destruction, but rather as the transformation and perfection of creation as a work particularly appropriated to the Father. "What Christ makes out of us can be something differ-

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<sup>258</sup> *Briefe*, 38; similarly in *Dogma*, 18.

<sup>259</sup> \**Schöpfung und Offenbarung*, 13; see also above, p. 102 n. 53.

<sup>260</sup> We say "in a certain way" because such an understanding of the relation between creation and salvation becomes problematic without the supralapsarian aspect which we have met in Schlatter's understanding of Christ's work of salvation (see above, pp. 76, 130). If God's saving agency is primarily viewed as the removal of human sin, the above sentence means that God's eternal decree to create man and be in communion with the same through Christ includes the Fall of man, Christ's assumption of fallen humanity, and his death on the cross. The danger here is to lose the actuality, concreteness and dramatic seriousness of sin and the resulting history of redemption. In how far this is the case in Barth's notion of creation as the external basis of the covenant and the covenant as the internal basis of creation (see e.g. *Church Dogmatics*, 3. 1, 97, 231) cannot be discussed here. For the critique that Barth – through his concept of election – subordinates creation to covenant, thereby depriving the *Bundesgeschichte* of its true historical character, see e.g. Gunton, *Christ and Creation*, 94-95; *The Triune Creator*, 162-65; P. Brunner, "Trennt die Rechtfertigungslehre die Konfessionen," 104-12; Klassen, *Heilsgeschichte bei Peter Brunner*, 240-53; Hempelmann, *Unaufhebbare Subjektivität Gottes?*, 146-77.

<sup>261</sup> "Natur, Sünde und Gnade," 63; cf. \**Lehre von der Sünde*, 22-23.

<sup>262</sup> See Neuer, *Zusammenhang*, 375.

ent than humanity and can transform and complete it, but not destroy it."<sup>263</sup> Similarly, a pneumatology must not be developed "in tacit contradiction" to the work of the Father and the Son.<sup>264</sup> That Schlatter regards it as one of the central characteristics of the work of Holy Spirit not to undermine or break, but to empower and perfect, the human person as God's creature, came sufficiently to the fore above. Hence, to conceive of the one work of the triune God in contradiction to the other ultimately leads to a conflict between the persons of the Trinity. As Schlatter argues in his dispute with Karl Heim:

Flight to Jesus – oh yes. . . . Our walk to Jesus is indeed a flight. But from what do we flee? Do we flee from God's world? Away from nature, away from space and time, away from the body and from life, from the law that forms us inwardly, from thinking, willing and acting? Do we want to flee to Jesus, away from what God has made and given? Do we really think we could come to Jesus when we flee from God? Is he, in the end, a substitute for God and the destroyer of God's work? The antithesis stands like this: Why did Jesus come into this world? Was it because this world is God's work and property or because it is not?<sup>265</sup>

## ii. The distinctness of the divine actions and works

### a) The actuality of *Heilsgeschichte* – new actions and works

To speak of a teleological and eschatological directedness of God's agency means, for Schlatter, to speak of new actions and works which transcend the earlier ones.<sup>266</sup> God "is the one who moves forward and creates the new. What happened once does not set him limits."<sup>267</sup> This newness is not to be grounded primarily in God's reaction to man's sinful action but in the personalness of divine action as grace and love. "The grace speaks of a

<sup>263</sup> *Dogma*, 279. Cf. *Sprechstunde*, 14.

<sup>264</sup> *Gründe*, 70-71.

<sup>265</sup> "Idealismus oder Theologie," 371. Further passages in which Schlatter outlines the actional unity of the three persons of the Trinity are *History of the Christ*, 388-89; *Theology of the Apostles*, 143-44; *Dogma*, 352-53; *Ruf Jesu*, 318-19; *Erläuterungen II*, 280-81. For the Heim-Schlatter dispute see Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter: ein Leben*, 708-25.

<sup>266</sup> We met this idea above, p. 102.

<sup>267</sup> *Andachten*, 419; cf. "Zwei Scharen von Hoffenden," 320 (God "is not yet finished with what has already been created").

new beginning, of the vanishing of the old, of the freedom of the one who gives out of his spontaneous love."<sup>268</sup>

The remarkable aspect here is that Schlatter's concept of the interaction and interrelation between God and man entails the idea of genuine novelty and surprise. Concerning Christ's death on the cross Schlatter states that this act of the divine grace

is something new for the world, however not in such a way as if only the relationship of the world to God became different. A relationship cannot change without there being at the same time a change in the relationship of both entities which are related to each other. The relationship of the world is renewed because God's acting [*Verhalten*] towards it is newly formed. He gave what so far he had not given, he creates what so far does not exist, he realises what so far constituted the mystery of his hidden kingdom. To think of a manifoldness, a development, a progress, in one word, a history in God's acting towards the world does not undermine his absoluteness and invests the historical act at the same time with its true meaning [*Realbedeutung*].<sup>269</sup>

As far as we can see, this is the point at which Schlatter's attempt to overcome the old dualism of God and world finds its strongest expression. The sentences just quoted state clearly that God is capable of truly experiencing time and history. This is because of the difference between works already accomplished and works not yet accomplished – a difference which is integral to a concept of teleological agency.<sup>270</sup> On these grounds, Schlatter questions the dualistic world view in which the human sphere of time and space in its changeability stands in an unbridgeable contrast to the divine realm of eternity in its immutability. The Christian faith, says Schlatter, understands God

as the giving and working one, as the one who endows us with his grace. By this the entry of the divine acting into our own living space is stated, and the time is no longer separated from the divine work but is seized by it. The 'now' is set into God's goal, and he is thought as the one who prepares for us the present moment and who, in the present moment, grants us participation in his work in such a way that he himself grips and moves us. Thus, the world view is overturned which understands the

<sup>268</sup> "Vergebung und Rechtfertigung," 30.

<sup>269</sup> \**Christologie*, fragments; cf. *Paulus der Bote*, 564-65. For a similar statement regarding the eschatological perfection of creation see *Dogma*, 535.

<sup>270</sup> The idea of God's ability to experience time was already adumbrated in Schlatter's conviction that God remains present in time as that which he has created (see above, p. 147; cf. Walldorf, *Realistische Philosophie*, 198). For the notion that intentional action requires the experience of time see P. Brunner's critical engagement with Thomas Aquinas' concept of teleology in *Probleme der Teleologie*, 45-47. In his essay "Die Freiheit des Menschen" P. Brunner reflects: "Why is the creation of man as such not yet his perfection, not yet his eschatological transformation? Obviously this 'not yet' is the ground of the actuality of God's *Heilsgeschichte*" (p. 112).

sphere of changeable life, that moves from being born to death, as a dark cave below and which, above all of that, constructs a divine sphere in the rigidity of the ever same to itself being [*in der Starreheit des sich selbst gleichen Seins*].<sup>271</sup>

b) Divine monocausality, human sin and the distinctness of God's works

In Schlatter, the new works of God are understood as a new creation which means that they are qualitatively distinct from, and even discontinuous from, the first creation. Schlatter outlines the transitions from the first creation to the new creation and from the new creation to the eschatological and eternal kingdom of God – the new heaven and the new earth – not only in terms of development and progress but also as a one-sided, sovereign, creative act. This act takes place in operational analogy to the *creatio ex nihilo* of the first creation and must therefore be qualified as a divine mono-act [*Alleinhandeln*].<sup>272</sup> Put in the nature-grace terminology this sounds as follows: "God's grace originates beyond nature and enters into the natural process and uses it according to its [grace] will. Yet, because of this it is never clamped [*eingespannt*] in the natural process. The beginning of eternal life is not already the birth but rebirth."<sup>273</sup>

The aforementioned aspects reappear in Schlatter's concept of the trinitarian mediation of divine action. We could summarise this in the phrase *opera trinitatis ad extra sunt distincta*. The works of Christ and the Holy Spirit are not simply the restitution of creation. As we have seen, Schlatter speaks of "a new act of love" being "more profound and more lofty," "more powerful in effect and richer in gift than what had been forfeited and destroyed through man's enmity."<sup>274</sup> In Christ, Schlatter underlines, we are dealing with a history which "carries a divine creative act in itself and thus establishes a true development

<sup>271</sup> "Glaube und Geschichte," 346. The whole passage (pp. 345-46) is important in this context.

<sup>272</sup> See the section on transcendental action beginning on p. 96.

<sup>273</sup> *Andachten*, 48.

<sup>274</sup> *Theology of the Apostles*, 246; similarly *ibid.*, 260.

which seizes everything we are – not merely repeating or partly changing that which exists but lifting everything into a new and more supreme form [*Gestalt*]."<sup>275</sup> The actions of Christ and the Spirit are as creative as the act of *creatio originalis*.<sup>276</sup> And therefore, the being of the new man is of a new quality because it is being-in-God, in Christ and in the Spirit.<sup>277</sup>

The discontinuity between the old and the new creation can take the form of an antithesis. This is because of the actuality of sin in the world. A mere development, Schlatter argues, concerning the perfection of all things, would also bring the results of human sinfulness to their ripeness. Therefore, we are in need of the one "who creates the new and lets the old vanish."<sup>278</sup> Probably the strongest expression in this context occurs in Schlatter's outline of regeneration: "It [regeneration] does not speak of the preservation and development of the life already in us but of a new beginning which not only transcends the existing but demolishes it and replaces the old life, which is doomed and gets removed, through a new one."<sup>279</sup>

Schlatter understands the relation between the old man, the new man and the perfected man – even when he leaves sin out of consideration – in terms of discontinuity because a creative act of God brings the creature to perfection. Under the conditions of human sinfulness, Schlatter expounds, this creative act becomes a divine mono-act.<sup>280</sup> These distinc-

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<sup>275</sup> *Dogma*, 279.

<sup>276</sup> See especially above, pp. 84, 98, 133.

<sup>277</sup> See *Dogma*, 342, 352, 541.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.*, 538; cf. "Vergebung und Rechtfertigung," 30; *Paulus der Bote*, 256; *Kennen wir Jesus?*, 33; *Theology of the Apostles*, 246.

<sup>279</sup> *Dogma*, 461. See also *Einleitung* 480: "That which he [the Spirit] breaks is the sinful will and the dark thoughts which arise from the false desires."

<sup>280</sup> As the respective quotations make clear, the idea of a monocausal creative act excludes any synergistic understanding of the transition from the old to the new man. Rieger is fully right to conclude that "through his reference to a 'creative act' . . . Schlatter – in his own way – makes allowance for a deeply Reformatory concern" (*Rechtfertigungslehre*, 419-20).

tions and the correlating idea of a true diversity of divine actions and works mean that creation – even the prelapsarian one – must not be ascribed salvific quality. Schlatter's statements are not lacking the desirable clarity: "Something completely new, however, has happened – something which nature is never able to accomplish – when the gracious will of God grips us in such a way that we believe in him."<sup>281</sup> In the same way, Schlatter clearly differentiates between *Geschichte* and *Heilsgeschichte*. "It is not a quantitative limitation but a qualitative distinction that characterises that part of history which possesses faith-creative power: the events, which show us God's grace, possess the procreative power to bring forth faith."<sup>282</sup> Put in pneumatological terms: " Sacred history is only that which stems from the Holy Spirit, and only then can there be talk about the Holy Spirit, when there are holy persons in whom he lives as his work."<sup>283</sup>

### iii. Continuity, discontinuity and the mystery of God's creative act

One could articulate Schlatter's concept of the structure of God's agency in terms of an integrative polarity: the divine actions and works are related in such a way that a) through their unity and continuity their distinctness does not collapse into separateness and b) their distinctness and discontinuity does not amalgamate their unity into uniformity. Schlatter labours to hold both aspects together, a fact which could be seen in those passages in which he speaks of new creation and, at the same time, of continuity.<sup>284</sup> The conceptual basis of the relational pattern of integrative polarity is God's personal action as grace and love. It provides Schlatter with the equipment to argue for an exclusive, creative act in

<sup>281</sup> *Andachten*, 47; similarly e.g. in *Dogma*, 51; "Natur, Sünde und Gnade," 56; *Selbstdarstellungen*, 156.

<sup>282</sup> "Glaube und Geschichte," 339.

<sup>283</sup> "Heilige Geschichte," 221.

<sup>284</sup> See e.g. *Dogma*, 279, 538; *Theology of the Apostles*, 246; *Andachten*, 46-47; *Marienreden*, 14-15.

which a) God alone is active and the creature passive and b) the creature is treated according to the ways of God's grace and love; according to God's eternal purpose for communion of love with man. As Schlatter states with regard to the new heaven and the new earth, the creature "lies inviolable, well protected and secure in his hand, especially when he – in the glory of his almighty grace – gives what nature cannot, and is not supposed to, give us."<sup>285</sup> We have seen that Schlatter consistently reflects this idea christologically and pneumatologically. Through the incarnate Word and in the Holy Spirit, God is able to create the new in such a way that he completes his creature.<sup>286</sup> In this Schlatter has reached the mystery of God's creative act and thus the point at which theological reflection comes to an end.<sup>287</sup> This explains Schlatter's awareness that a completely satisfactory answer to the question about continuity and discontinuity is impossible: "How in the act of new creation the preservation of that which is now given to us takes place, lies beyond any theory."<sup>288</sup>

### C. Towards a non-competitive relation between God and man

At different points in our study we have suggested that Schlatter's modal ontology of divine action paves the way for a non-competitive relation between God and man.<sup>289</sup> In Schlatter, as we shall expose in a few moments, God and man are not mutually exclusive but related in such a way that both are given the space to be truly themselves and to act according to their distinct being. How Schlatter secures the distinctness of God's being and action through his radical interpretation of divine transcendence has been expounded

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<sup>285</sup> "Wunder der Bibel," 79.

<sup>286</sup> See also Neuer, *Zusammenhang*, 209-11; Rieger, *Rechtfertigungslehre*, 348-50.

<sup>287</sup> See above, p. 20 n. 32, p. 133 n. 187.

<sup>288</sup> *Dogma*, 541.

<sup>289</sup> The phrase "non-competitive relation" is taken from Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity*, 2 because it adequately captures the central aspect of Schlatter's concept.



above. Our concern now is to inquire whether Schlatter's thought carries through conceptually thereby achieving the second desideratum outlined in the opening section of this chapter.

i. On the relation between human and divine being

Schlatter's modal ontology of divine action, his – as we have called it – ontology of love and giving must be understood as a resolute fight against any monistic or pantheistic notions of divine agency.

For love does not work absorbingly. A Godhead which annihilates all the reality besides itself is power but never has good will. Goodness gives, and it does so by making its gift the property of its recipient and by enriching, strengthening and giving life to him through it. Only an egoistically distorted love brings about the weakening and abolition of its recipient. However, when love arises in us as the undistorted affirmation of the other, it has the power to overcome the logical mistake that we commit in perverting the unity into an empty One. Whereas the one who exercises his union with God as amalgamation with him desires unity only as uniformity, love institutes that type of unity which unites those who are alive in themselves, in the same thought and will.<sup>290</sup>

The conceptual function of Schlatter's notion of divine personal action as grace and love is not only to safeguard God's transcendence but at the same time to secure the distinctness of human being in its otherness and *Selbständigkeit* vis-à-vis God. "Our being-in-God is of such a kind that personalities have space in him to be, so that he in himself not only allows but establishes and sustains the own, spontaneous and free activity of human persons [*Geister*]. *This is the point where pantheism always fails*" (emphasis A. L.).<sup>291</sup> What seems to cancel each other out as long as divine causality is conceived of as operating in the form of a natural or tangible force, is now conceptually integrated – namely true relatedness and true otherness of God and man. Indeed, as we have seen above, when God in his action

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<sup>290</sup> *Dogma*, 34; cf. *ibid.*, 156, 506, 520.

<sup>291</sup> \**Wesen und Quellen*, 94. See also *ibid.*, 133. This is the context in which Schlatter sets the Christian notion of man's relation to God in contrast to Spinoza's ideas which were influenced by "the pantheistic thoughts of Jewish mysticism" (see *Philosophische Arbeit*, 51-52; *Dogma*, 31-34). Schlatter expounds that "a theology . . . according to which the divine action deprives the world of its reality" can be called "Spinozism in the wider sense" (*Metaphysik*, 59).

upon, with and in man comes closer to the same, this increase of presence leads to an increase of distinctness.<sup>292</sup>

Under these conditions the relation between man's dependence upon the giving agency of God and human freedom can also be interpreted in terms of direct proportion. Again Schlatter argues that an unspecified and abstract notion of causality leaves us oscillating between freedom and dependence. Freedom is understood as the "breach of dependence", and dependence is understood as the "hindrance of freedom." However, as soon as grace and love become the modes of God's efficacy, freedom must no longer be understood as freedom from God, but precisely through, and – ultimately for, God, as a gift mediated through God's action by which he enables and liberates people to be themselves.<sup>293</sup> Put differently, when the divine love is actualised, the contingency of the creature upon God becomes the ground of creaturely freedom and fullness. It is, Schlatter argues, God's "good and giving will that makes the dependence in which everything created stands to him, the basis of our freedom."<sup>294</sup>

We could summarise Schlatter's concept of the relation between God and man in the phrase, "relationship without absorption; community in otherness and distinctness." And to establish and realise this relationship is, according to Schlatter, the specific work of the third person of the Trinity *ad extra*. The Holy Spirit mediates true relationship. In the Spirit God is actively and creatively present in man. Yet, this point of utmost divine presence and immanence is, at the same time, the point of true distinctness because the Spirit as person

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<sup>292</sup> See Tanner's succinct articulation of the same idea in *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity*, 3: "The distinctness of the creature is thus the consequence of relationship with God as its creator; here difference is the product of unity, of what brings together, of relationship. The perfection of created life, the perfection of the creature in its difference from God, increases with the perfection of relationship with God: the closer the better." Similarly in *God and Creation*, 85.

<sup>293</sup> See *Furcht vor dem Denken*, 54-55; *Dogma*, 155-56.

<sup>294</sup> *Metaphysik*, 87; similarly *ibid.*, 59; *Ethik* 77, "Unterwerfung," 9. For Schlatter's adoption of these ideas from Baader see Rieger, *Rechtfertigungslehre*, 274-80.

personifies, that is, gives true being, individuality and autonomy [*Selbständigkeit*] to man vis-à-vis God. "For the work of the Holy Spirit does not consist in that we meld together with God, but in that we are reconciled with him; this, however, rests on the recognition of our distinctness from God."<sup>295</sup> This otherness applies also, as Schlatter repeatedly emphasises, to the Holy Spirit himself. The *Holy* Spirit must not be confused with the human spirit.<sup>296</sup>

ii. On the relation between divine and human action

It is almost self-evident at this stage that Schlatter's modal ontology of divine action leads to the notion of a non-competitive relation between God's action and human action. Because of God's grace and love, his action is not the negation or limitation of human action but that which ontologically founds and enables the same. This is, as came to the fore above, the central moment of Schlatter's notion of *concursum divinum*: the true *dignitas causalitatis* of the human person stands in relation to – moreover requires – the "extensive" and "intensive totality" of God's omnicausality.<sup>297</sup> Put the other way round, God's omniactivity includes human agency. An increase of divine activity means an increase of human activity.

On this basis, Schlatter argues for a comprehensive and universal cooperation, a "*Mit- und Ineinanderwirken*" of God and creature. In every creaturely event and activity, God must be said to be active – indeed, God acts in and through the creature. It is crucial in this connection to recall Schlatter's differentiated view of this *concursum*. It applies to different creatures in different ways, that is, in propriety to their respective being. What distin-

<sup>295</sup> *Briefe*, 62.

<sup>296</sup> See e.g. *Dogma*, 347; *Gründe*, 70.

<sup>297</sup> See above, p. 39. For the *dignitas causalitatis* as part of the ontological dignity of the creature see also P. Brunner, "Gott, das Nichts und die Kreatur," 43–44.

guishes the *concurus specialis* from the *concurus generalis* is that man is not "wood and stone" but person. God does not use him as inanimate tool or instrument, rather the cooperation takes place in the full affirmation of all that characterises man as personal agent.<sup>298</sup>

Further, the *concurus specialis* of God and the postlapsarian man is qualitatively distinct from the *concurus specialissima* of God and his children. There is a structural analogy between the different *concursi* in that God's omnicausal creativity generally brings forth and enables authentic human activity. As Schlatter states in his exposition of the work of the Holy Spirit in the prophets:

The enigmatic factor in the epiphany is not absolute, not essentially different from the incomprehensibility intrinsic to every event, in so far as the course of the world shows the activity of God always united with the activity of things. Here too, in the prophetic illumination, we have duality encompassed in unity, human spiritual activity is not surrendered because of the inner work of the divine Spirit. Only the incomplete and initial levels of prophecy experience inspiration as obstruction and bonding of the mental capacities. In its purity, prophecy is self-willing as well as divine thinking and willing in the prophet. The unification of both consists in the fact that the divine activity awakens, guides and rules but at the same time adapts itself to the individual particularity of human spiritual life.<sup>299</sup>

Yet, the new *concurus specialissima* is not itself the result of *concurus specialis*. Rather, in analogy to the first *concurus*, the new *concurus* is constituted through a monocausal creative act of God. The same applies to the *concurus* of God and man in the eschatological kingdom of God in which "the unification of everybody with God's will and acting takes place immediately; and this unification is unlimited and makes everything, which the creature does, a work of God."<sup>300</sup> Rieger aptly summarises this aspect of Schlatter's thought: we can only speak of an inclusive omni-activity (*Allwirksamkeit*) of God

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<sup>298</sup> To give expression to this Schlatter frequently uses the term "organ" (see above, p. 24 n. 48; p. 121 n. 130; Rieger, *Rechtfertigungslehre*, 416).

<sup>299</sup> \**Wesen und Quellen*, 143-44.

<sup>300</sup> *Paulus der Bote*, 419.

when the same is preceded by an exclusive monoactivity (*Alleinwirksamkeit*) of God which enables and founds human activity.<sup>301</sup>

It is important to see that Schlatter's concept makes it possible to speak of cooperation without relating creaturely and divine activity in a synergistic or Pelagian manner. Schlatter formulates in all desirable clarity:

We must not teach synergism, thereby combining a bit of God with a bit of human, a bit of gift and a bit of work in such a way as to say that God begins and man helps him to completion, or man begins and God helps him to completion. This is the beginning toward the negation of God. Rather, we must teach the God who is a person, the personal Spirit whose work is, generates, shapes and determines personal life, however in such a way that what he creates is my own life. If the Spirit is to move us without us moving, is to enlighten us without us thinking, is to sanctify us without us willing, is to make us obedient without us obeying, is to deliver us from evil without us leaving it, then we do not have Christ's promise for us.<sup>302</sup>

### iii. The mystery of God's creative act, the glory of God and the glory of man

Schlatter perceives the mystery of God's creative act in the context of the above issues as follows: a human act does not cease to be authentically human when it has its possibility and ground above itself in the sovereign act of God. A further inquiry, which attempts to explain the point at which a divine act gives rise to and enables a human act, is not possible. The hiddenness and incomprehensibility of the "How" does not, Schlatter underlines, question the "That" of the connection between God's agency and man's agency.<sup>303</sup> Schlatter sees himself confronted here with the mystery of Christian faith.

<sup>301</sup> See Rieger, *Rechtfertigungslehre*, 419.

<sup>302</sup> "Die Sünde gegen den heiligen Geist," 75. On the whole, Schlatter's concept shows an affinity to the notion of "double agency" as defined by Owen Thomas: "What is affirmed in double agency, as I understand it, is that in one event both divine and creaturely agents are fully active. God has not overwhelmed the finite agent so that it is merely a passive instrument, and God is not simply the creator and sustainer who allows the creaturely agent to act independently of divine agency. Furthermore, the divine and finite agents are not merely complementary, that is, they do not contribute distinct parts to the one event. As many authors have put it, God acts in and through the finite agent which also acts in the event" ("Recent Thought on Divine Agency," 46).

<sup>303</sup> See above, p. 20 n. 32; p. 84. In his argumentation Schlatter refers to the fact that man knows of the spirit and body without being able to explain how a spiritual act gives rise to a physical act (see e.g. 14, 157, 541; *Gründe* 30-31. This does not, however, mean that Schlatter regards God as the body which is supposed to be God's body.

There must be, of course, a final and deepest point in our inner life at which it is impossible for our eye to distinguish between what has been given to us and what its consequences are in our personal life; between what is God's act that touches us and what is our act by which we let ourselves touch. Exactly this is the peculiar thing of faith – that both merge into one another, indistinguishable to our eye, no longer analysable. In my view, religious psychology fails here completely. We only have the finished result before us and with that the clear consciousness: 'what has come into being here is not my product.' If the consciousness was, 'I have made my faith; I have made myself to believe; I believe this because I want to believe it,' then I would refuse to use the term 'faith' in this context. To the one who tells me 'I believe this because I want to believe it,' I will answer: 'You do not even know what faith is.' . . . Thus, they are mysteriously interwoven: divine activity and human decision; God's creating and, breaking out of that, the life of the creature; the Fatherly work of God and the looking up of the child who finds the eyes of the Father.<sup>304</sup>

The analogy which, according to Schlatter, comes closest to capturing such an assignment of divine and human agency is not that of natural causality but that of interpersonal love. Love is liberating action in which the agency of the one founds and enables the true agency of the other "in order that through it the other may become capable of himself [*seiner selbst mächtig werde*]."<sup>305</sup> Since this creative love is mediated through the Holy Spirit we return here to Schlatter's notion of the specific function and work of the third person of the Trinity *ad extra*. Schlatter reflects the mystery of God's creative agency pneumatologically. "From our perspective it appears to be unbelievable that an act which we have executed, in which we act as the thinking and willing ones, is brought about through God's Spirit and is a gift that he grants to us." A function of pneumatology is therefore

that it demonstrates the reception in the most supreme functioning of our spirit, namely in our thinking and our willing . . . Through this reception our activity becomes primarily and simultaneously a being-formed [*Gestaltetwerden*] by God and also a service for God. The doctrine of the Spirit has to show when and how the productive power of our intellect is grounded in a hearing through which our thinking becomes a receiving of the divine truth; when and how our willing and loving rests upon a being-moved [*Bewegtwerden*] through which our willing and loving becomes the receiving of the divine love.<sup>306</sup>

<sup>304</sup> "Unterwerfung," 11; cf. *Dogma*, 484; *Marienreden*, 8.

<sup>305</sup> \**Dogmatik I*, 139-40. For the explicit application of this analogy to God's liberating and bestowing action see *Dogma*, 154-55. In a similar way Greshake argues that the relation between God's grace and human freedom must be developed on the basis of the "phenomenologically demonstrable model of personal love" ("Freiheit oder Gnade?," 123-28). Bieler argues "that the unfolding of the question about human freedom is only possible as a phenomenology of love" (*Freiheit als Gabe*, 17). See also Rieger, *Rechtfertigungslehre*, 414-20 where further references to Greshake and other authors are given.

<sup>306</sup> "Noch ein Wort," 120-121; similarly in "Wandel nach dem Geist," 15.

It is appropriate to say that, according to Schlatter, pneumatology is that dogmatic locus where the notion of *concursum divinum* – the central subject of the doctrine of divine providence – needs to be discussed.

Schlatter's notion of a non-competitive relation between divine and human being and action eventuates in a positive assignment of God's and man's glory.

[T]he glorification that God grants the creature happens always and completely through his own glorification. . . . The condescendence of God's love brings forth God's greatness, and his hiddenness, which emerges through the fact that he grants the creature to actuate itself, mediates his revelation. Therefore, we have nothing to desire but God's glory, for since God's work has its ground in God's love he reveals his glory by making the creature glorious."<sup>307</sup>

We could call this Schlatter's rendering of Irenaeus' phrase "*Gloria Dei vivens homo*."

God's glory consists in that man is truly alive.<sup>308</sup>

God's love is the ultimate revelation of his holiness, for he remains "the absolute, sublime one above us before whom we bow in worship." Schlatter points out that God's "love makes his distance from us ultimately real, ultimately recognisable, for God's greatness is revealed in it. It is precisely through the knowledge of the divine love that real worship comes about – which is more than dull astonishment at his power."<sup>309</sup> However, the mutual glorification between God and man takes place when God indwells man in his Holy Spirit and pours out his love into the heart of man. When man loves God the circle of gift and love between the giver and the recipient is closed.

Because love is the point of unification toward which all the capacities given to us move, it is the greatest among the gifts given to us through which the other gifts in us are completed. It is the goal of grace, its full appropriation in knowledge and the will, the will and acting. God's grace thus determines the basis of our personal life. In giving us love, Christ achieves both: God is revealed to us and effective in us, and man is made alive and effective in God. It [love] accomplishes God's and our glorification in unity so that God's glory works our aliveness and our life works God's glorification.<sup>310</sup>

<sup>307</sup> *Dogma*, 197; similarly *ibid.*, 33: "Because God has his glory in that which he creates, we work the glorification of God by being what he has made us for."

<sup>308</sup> Cf. Gunton, "*Soli Deo Gloria?*," 171-72; Greshake, "*Freiheit oder Gnade?*," 135.

<sup>309</sup> *Dogma*, 197.

<sup>310</sup> *Ibid.*, 515. See also *ibid.*, 37-38, 520. The parallels between what we have just outlined and Schlatter's notion of the personal-dialogical character of the communion of the different persons of the Godhead are obvious here.

#### D. Critical questions

The claim of Schlatter's "empirical theology" to be in accordance with the experiential reality of this world serves as point of departure when we now move to bring some critical aspects to our attention. The problems which we discern concern Schlatter's notion of evil and lie more in what he does not say than in what he does. Our main critique is this: Schlatter's emphasis on God's grace and love compromises – indeed, limits his perception of the actuality of evil in this world.

The positivity of God's grace and love determines Schlatter's thinking through and through. His modal ontology of God's action makes it impossible for Schlatter to develop his theology out of the antithesis of sin and grace. For all creaturely being and action is, and remains, a good gift of God who, notwithstanding the actuality of sin, will bring his creation to perfection. One would be mistaken to interpret Schlatter's positive theology of creation as theo-ontological positivism and triumphalist monism. Schlatter, not least because of his first hand experience, is aware of the dark side of nature.<sup>311</sup> The same applies to his understanding of man and history.<sup>312</sup> Because of the true otherness, freedom and causal power with which God endows the human person, the latter is capable of sinful action in rebellion against God and his good purposes with creation. The fact that history becomes *Heilsgeschichte* is anything but self-evident in Schlatter.

However, it is in this context that we see the questionable aspects arising. As we have seen, Schlatter ascribes a relative creaturely creativity to man. Yet, although he elaborates that the evil will has "heroic energies in itself" and is connected with "great achievements of thinking and acting," he negates the idea that man "actuates creative power" when he

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<sup>311</sup> See *Erlebtes*, 128-29; Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter: ein Leben*, 22-25.

<sup>312</sup> See especially above, Chapter II. 2. C. iv.



brings forth evil.<sup>313</sup> This view is the direct correlate to the idea of sin as the volitional perversion of God's good gifts.<sup>314</sup> We must ask why Schlatter excludes the gift of creaturely creativity from the *abusus boni*? He wants to ensure that the power of evil and sin is not to be located on the same level with God's power, an idea which provides the basis for Schlatter's notion of man as *simul creatus et peccator*. But is this not a lapse into the old frame of reference in which the power of the creature must be denied in order to secure the power of God? To us it appears unnecessary to reduce the power of evil in this way precisely because Schlatter's concept of divine action provides him with the conceptual equipment to conceive of the power of God's grace and love in such a way that even that which evil "creates" is kept within bounds through God's creative presence. Furthermore, the decisive acts of God's *Heilsgeschichte* – Christ's work of salvation and the creation of the new heaven and the new earth – through which the power of evil is overcome and, finally, destroyed, are interpreted by Schlatter as creative acts. This is the ultimate basis for the conviction that God, and not evil, will achieve his good purposes with creation. To be clear, the power of man is limited simply because he is creature. In the same way as he does not have the power to bring himself to being from nothingness, it does not stand in his evil power to return to nothingness.<sup>315</sup> Yet, to deny that man is "diabolically creative"<sup>316</sup> within these bounds runs contrary to the main outlines of Schlatter's concept, especially his emphasis on the actuality of the history between God and man and his idea that the most supreme gift of the Creator is man's greatest danger when used against God.<sup>317</sup>

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<sup>313</sup> *Dogma*, 231.

<sup>314</sup> For Schlatter's idea of evil as *abusus boni* see above, p. 67; Rieger, *Rechtfertigungslehre*, 425-26.

<sup>315</sup> See P. Brunner, "Gott, das Nichts und die Kreatur," 45-47.

<sup>316</sup> The term is taken from P. Brunner, "Die Freiheit des Menschen," 116.

<sup>317</sup> See above, p. 67.

The fact that he fails to discern those actualities and structures in which human sin and evil assumes demonic or satanic quality, is as weighty as the inconsistency of Schlatter's approach in this nexus. Without going into greater detail, the atrocities of the twentieth century have sharpened our perception of such collective structures. Schlatter is fully aware that human, sinful action can assume satanic form. This happens when the drive of destruction determines the action to such an extent that destruction itself becomes the purpose of action and evil the means to experience lust.<sup>318</sup> Here, however, Schlatter's observation breaks off. He does not reflect on the possibility that the evil actions of man could, for example, establish socio-political structures which then act back upon man in such a way that man is enslaved by evil. In such a context human sin and evil can no longer be viewed as the abuse of the good. Rather, we might be confronted with institutions and structures so powerful that they provide a plausibility for sinful action, that is, doing evil makes simply more sense than doing good. As Rieger has outlined, Schlatter's hamartiology shows "what the subject does in his willing and acting towards sin" but fails to show "what sin does with the subject."<sup>319</sup> The same must be said with regard to Schlatter's understanding of atheism. When he argues that there is strictly speaking no atheism but only antitheism<sup>320</sup> he fails to see the power of secularisation. The latter establishes a secularity in modern society which renders the God-question simply redundant because of the strong plausibility of living without God in the world.<sup>321</sup>

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<sup>318</sup> See *Dogma*, 228.

<sup>319</sup> Rieger, *Rechtfertigungslehre*, 427. The whole passage (pp. 420-27) is instructive in this context.

<sup>320</sup> See *Dogma*, 27.

<sup>321</sup> Craig M. Gay has outlined this aspect of secularisation in his book *The Way of the World*. A very interesting remark in this context comes from Hans Stroh: "After reading Trotsky's autobiography he [Schlatter] admitted that he – in the face of this book – must depart from his principle that there is no atheism but only antitheism" (quoted in Bailer, *Prinzip*, 199). In a way, we may say, Schlatter confirms our critique that at this point his theology does not fully correspond with the actuality of evil and sin in this world.

With regard to the satanic, Schlatter explains: "I shrank from the dealing with the satanic because – looking at my own weakness – I avoided the sight of evil."<sup>322</sup> However, this autobiographic confession must not cause us to overlook the dogmatic reasons for the blind spot in Schlatter's perception. It is the presupposition that evil is not creative, together with the idea that God, in the sovereignty and freedom of his grace, upholds the human creature, which leads Schlatter to argue that "the generation of a complete unnature [*Unnatur*] is impossible for any creaturely will."<sup>323</sup> The fully justified emphasis on God's creative and giving action and the resulting positive theology of nature, man and history brings Schlatter's theology unnecessarily into conflict with the experiential reality of our fallen world. This can also be seen in Schlatter's understanding of the state. In his ethics Schlatter outlines that Christianity has a "critical force" vis-à-vis the state and the responsibility to oppose "the rotten habits [*Unsitten*] of our people and the oppressive or slack law of our state." Schlatter goes as far as to not exclude the employment of force in this context "because the selfish blindness of man can aggravate to the extent that he must be overpowered with force and the community must be newly founded through its destruction."<sup>324</sup> It is the same Schlatter who – commenting on certain events regarding World War I and its aftermath – states that "the state cannot steal. When it [the state] requires life, it does not murder and when it takes property, it does not steal."<sup>325</sup> The Schlatter biographer brings this naive trust in the authority of a government into connection with Schlatter's peculiar "hesitation to make the question of the *Arierparagraphen* a question of confession [*Bekenntnis*]

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<sup>322</sup> *Rückblick*, 135.

<sup>323</sup> *Dogma*, 260.

<sup>324</sup> *Ethik*, 141-42.

<sup>325</sup> *Erlebtes*, 28.

*frage*]."<sup>326</sup> This hesitation can be seen in Schlatter's commentary on the Bethel confession of 1933.<sup>327</sup> At the end of August 1933 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Georg Merz, Hermann Sasse, Gerhard Stratenwerth and Wilhelm Vischer had formulated a draft of the Bethel Confession which was sent to a couple of examiners, among them Adolf Schlatter, Paul Althaus, Karl Barth and Hans Asmussen. The article, "Kirche und die Juden," was written by Vischer and concluded with a strong statement of solidarity which originally stemmed from Bonhoeffer: "*Die aus der Heidenwelt stammenden Christen müssen eher sich selbst der Verfolgung aussetzen als die durch Wort und Sakrament gestiftete kirchliche Bruderschaft mit dem Judenchristen freiwillig oder gezwungen auch nur in einer Beziehung preiszugeben.*"<sup>328</sup> Schlatter's critical comment on this sentence is as follows: "The community with the *Volksgenossen* is, in this hour, more important than the community with the *Judenchristen*."<sup>329</sup> According to Neuer, who has forcefully outlined Schlatter's sharp rejection of *Nationalsozialismus* and the *Deutsche Christen*, this comment "is devoid . . . of any plausibility." Notwithstanding his personal rejection of the *Arierparagraphen*, Schlatter's theological and ecclesial evaluation of the same in 1933 was lacking "that uncompromising clarity . . . which characterised the confessing groups around Bonhoeffer, Künneth and Niemöller." This, Neuer states, "was not devoid of a certain element of the tragic."<sup>330</sup>

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<sup>326</sup> Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter: ein Leben*, 749.

<sup>327</sup> For the history of the Bethel Confession see Müller, *Bekenntnis und Bekennen*; Felber, *Wilhelm Vischer als Ausleger der Heiligen Schrift*, 77-91.

<sup>328</sup> Quoted according to Müller, *Bekenntnis und Bekennen*, 115.

<sup>329</sup> \**Commentary on the Bethel Confession*, VI, p. 23.

<sup>330</sup> Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter: ein Leben*, 750-53.

## CHAPTER IV. CHRIST AND THE TRINITY

### 1. Schlatter's Doctrine of Christ

#### A. Introductory remarks

##### i. Jesus as the rule of thought for a concept of divine agency

When we now move to investigate basic aspects of Schlatter's christology, the reason – indeed, the necessity for this procedure is given by Schlatter himself. In numerous passages he explicitly turns our attention to Jesus in order to illustrate and deepen his notion of divine agency as we have outlined it so far. The majority of these references occurs in connection with Schlatter's outline of the work of the Holy Spirit.

God's act of revelation . . . consists in that he sets human personalities in a specific relationship to himself by indwelling them. Yet, that which the prophet experiences only in an initial way exists in the God-man in completion. The separation between life-moments conditioned either by the divine or by the human is transcended. It is substituted through a complete union, through a human 'I' that is – in its entire existence and life – a God-united one, a divine one. The Christ is the perfect prophet.<sup>1</sup>

It is, so to speak, in the genre of parallelism that Schlatter correlates the work of God's Spirit in the prophet and the relation of the divine and the human in Jesus:

The human 'I' of the prophet becomes the place of the activity of the Spirit and does not cease to be a human 'I' as a consequence of the inspiration it has received; the human 'I' of Jesus carries in itself the *pleroma* of God and becomes ontologically one with the 'I' of the eternal Son of God, and this without his human nature being destroyed.<sup>2</sup>

Schlatter argues that any conception of divine agency towards, and in, man must take its measure from the way in which the deity acts upon, and in, the incarnate Son of God. In his discussion of the idea that "the Spirit, since he is holy and God's [Spirit], becomes the destroyer of what is human," Schlatter critiques:

<sup>1</sup> \**Wesen und Quellen*, 172.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 177. Cf. *ibid.*, 187; *Dogma*, 337; *Theology of the Apostles*, 133.

This is an understanding of the Spirit which is not yet measured against Christ: neither against what we ourselves can see in him, nor against what he grants to us as God's grace. In Jesus we come face to face with the normal way in which the divine giving and the human receiving are related to each other.<sup>3</sup>

Schlatter also finds the notion of measuring one's concept of divine pneumatological agency against Christ in the teaching of the Apostles. "The disciples considered Jesus to be the bearer of the Spirit par excellence. They looked first and foremost to him in order to see how God's Spirit manifests itself and what he gives to men."<sup>4</sup> It is precisely along these lines that we must understand a reference which appears right after Schlatter has presented his concept of the work of the Spirit in man:

The knowledge of Jesus guides us to the proper apprehension of this idea by means of the manner in which deity and humanity are united in him. It is not the case that humanness is broken – rather it is wanted, brought forth by God and sanctified to be his organ. This provides *the rule* according to which also in us, proportional to our measure, the divine and the human enter into unity (emphasis A. L.).<sup>5</sup>

The tenor of the passages just quoted may be summarised as follows: we must not simply apply an *a priori* concept of the interrelation and interaction between God and man to christology. Rather, our understanding of the former must be developed in correspondence with the interaction and interrelation between God and his incarnate Son.<sup>6</sup> This prescribes for us the lines along which we shall examine Schlatter's christology: how does Schlatter conceive of the relation between the incarnate Son and God and what are the ramifications of this for his understanding of Christ's humanity?

<sup>3</sup> *Dogma*, 365. Similarly in *Gründe*, 70-71; *Theology of the Apostles*, 371; *Sprechstunde*, 67.

<sup>4</sup> *Theology of the Apostles*, 369.

<sup>5</sup> *Dogma*, 348-49. For similar references see also *Theology of the Apostles*, 133-135, 271.

<sup>6</sup> It is typical of Schlatter's form of thinking when he also states that the emergence of the God-man presupposes a relation of God and man in which the latter does not cease to be human (see *\*Christologie*, IV).

## ii. Schlatter's critique of different christological conceptions

In the centre of Schlatter's critical assessment of traditional attempts to relate Christ's deity and humanity, stands the twofold conviction that impersonal categories and analogies taken from nature a) are only of limited use in developing an adequate picture of the God-man as a living person, and b) tend to undermine the true humanity of Christ.<sup>7</sup> The Chalcedonian formulation of the doctrine of the two natures of Christ safeguards, Schlatter affirms, against the separation as well as the merging of the two natures in Christ. However, what is meant to describe a person turns into a picture of a physical connection, an "external composition" in which "two substances lie side by side."<sup>8</sup> The attempt to relate the two natures by ascribing priority to Christ's deity as that which is constitutive of his person, remains unsatisfactory. According to Schlatter, it is the image of a divine substance acting upon a human substance which renders the idea of *enhypostasis* problematic: Christ's humanity is undermined because it is not ascribed to his person but only to his nature.<sup>9</sup>

Schlatter's critical appraisal of the Reformation attempt to develop a more dynamic concept of the relation of Christ's deity and humanity through the doctrine of the *communicatio idiomatum* runs along similar lines. The idea "that the attributes detach themselves from their substance and that their transference to another substance does not alter the same" is, Schlatter outlines, more than questionable. He holds that "the humanity of Jesus would disappear if it were invested with the attributes of divine being."<sup>10</sup> The resulting dis-

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<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, Schlatter does not provide a differentiated and detailed discussion of the different christological approaches. In a rather general manner he refers to the unsatisfactory character of what he calls "the formula of Greek theology and its further development through the Lutheran and Reformed teachers" ("Bekenntnis zur Gottheit Jesu," 44). See also Rieger, *Rechtfertigungslehre*, 325-26.

<sup>8</sup> "Bekenntnis zur Gottheit Jesu," 44.

<sup>9</sup> See *Dogma*, 337-38. For a similar critique see Gunton who argues "that the weakness of all Christologies of enhypostasia . . . is that they tend to underplay the humanity of Jesus" (*Yesterday and Today*, 223; cf. idem, *Christ and Creation*, 48-50).

<sup>10</sup> *Dogma*, 339.

cussion between the Lutheran and the Reformed traditions of *finitum capax* (or *non capax*) *infiniti* moves, according to Schlatter, in the wrong direction. Being aware of the impropriety of spatial concepts, he states: "If, for once, the spatial imagery should be used it would say: the eternal Son has made space in himself for man and makes himself his [man's] place."<sup>11</sup> Put differently: *infinitum capax finiti*.

Schlatter also discerns the difficulty in relating Christ's deity and humanity in the type of kenotic christology according to which the eternal Logos – emptying himself of certain divine qualities and attributes – has transformed himself into human flesh. Schlatter agrees with the idea that "the will and action of the deity is directed towards the generation of Jesus' humanity." However, the natural analogy of transformation employed undermines both Christ's humanity and his deity. A deity which transforms itself ceases to be deity. A deity which transforms itself into man in such a way that, in a roundabout way, the deity emerges from humanity, has never brought about true humanity.<sup>12</sup>

The *cantus firmus* of Schlatter's critique is that the analogies taken from the realm of nature which are employed conceptually to explain the relation between Christ's deity and humanity, tend to establish the former at the expense of the latter. This docetic tendency is not merely the outcome of a christology which begins with the affirmation of Christ's deity by means of a high doctrine of the incarnation. In the same way as there can be a docetism "from above" there can also be a docetism "from below." The notion that "something divine" was, "as light and force," radiated into Jesus after he had already become a complete man remains, Schlatter expounds, "on the docetic track" because it divinizes Christ's humanity and thus renders it indifferent.<sup>13</sup> Not those who affirm, but those who deny Jesus'

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<sup>11</sup> "Bekenntnis zur Gottheit Jesu," 44.

<sup>12</sup> *Dogma*, 339.

<sup>13</sup> "Bekenntnis zur Gottheit Jesu," 42.



deity, are in need of "idealising the man Jesus," of doing "hagiolatry with the man Jesus," of fantastically venerating "his human genius and amiableness."<sup>14</sup> It is to Schlatter's own solution of the problems just adumbrated that we now turn.

### **B. The birth of the Son of God – a creative act of the Trinity**

Although Schlatter himself does not begin his christology with the doctrine of the incarnation, this dogmatic locus gives us the most direct access to the issues which need to be addressed in the context of our study. As we shall see in due course, Schlatter's concept of the incarnation of God's Son rests upon his understanding of divine Sonship as it is revealed in the concrete course of Jesus' life. For this reason, Schlatter cannot conceive of the incarnation in abstraction from the history of the Christ. Suffice it here to observe that Schlatter understands divine Sonship to denote a communion between God and Jesus which – and this is the crucial point here – is constitutive of the life of the incarnate Son: "In the concept of Sonship, Jesus affirms the priority and superiority of God. Through the divine loving and giving he himself comes into being with everything he has."<sup>15</sup> Schlatter perceives this ontological dependence of the incarnate Son upon the Father throughout Jesus' life and in particular at the beginning of the same.

#### **i. Incarnation and the gift of divine Sonship**

When Jesus "praised God as his Father, . . . he described God as the one who had given him life through his creative activity."<sup>16</sup> This creative act is the moment of Jesus' be-

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 47. An illuminating exposition of such a docetism from below can be found in Gunton, *Yesterday and Today*, 10-31.

<sup>15</sup> *Glaube*, 231-32.

<sup>16</sup> *History of the Christ*, 28.

coming and, as such, Schlatter argues, the granting of divine Sonship to Jesus.<sup>17</sup> Schlatter specifies the divine creative activity through which Jesus' Sonship comes about as God's loving, vivifying and giving.<sup>18</sup> To understand Jesus' Sonship as the sovereign and creative gift of God obviates the idea according to which the man Jesus gradually became the Son of God by "growing from below upwards into the Godhead." This idea would render God passive by positing a communion with God – a divine Sonship – which is supposed to have come about without God.<sup>19</sup> Schlatter counters such a notion by explicating the birth of Jesus as a creative act of the triune God, a notion which is grounded in the different New Testament statements, which regard either the eternal Logos, or the Holy Spirit, or the Father as the acting subject.

Whether the Father, or the Word, or the Spirit, who else does it other than the one and same God? Certainly, with respect to the manner in which the glance at the triune God is embraced by thinking, it is important whether the bond that unites Jesus with God is described this way or the other. However, it is wrong to say that in those apostolic words which derive Jesus' being from God's Spirit, a negation or a reduction of Jesus' deity is present. God's Spirit is no less divine, no less pre-existent, no less one with God than God's Word.<sup>20</sup>

#### a) The incarnation of the eternal Logos

Schlatter understands the divine Word as "the causal power by which Jesus' humanity came into being and by which it was determined and led."<sup>21</sup> As we have elaborated above, Schlatter ascribes full deity to God's eternal Logos and identifies the same with the person of the eternal Son of God.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, the birth of God's Son is – as the incarnation of the divine Word – a personal act – an observation that shall concern us again at a later point.

<sup>17</sup> *Dogma*, 332.

<sup>18</sup> *Glaube*, 232.

<sup>19</sup> See *Dogma*, 332; *Jesu Gottheit*, 8; *Theologie des NT I*, 473.

<sup>20</sup> "Bekenntnis zur Gottheit Jesu," 42. The whole section (pp. 41-42) is one of Schlatter's strongest expressions of the principle of *opera trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*.

<sup>21</sup> *Theology of the Apostles*, 135.

<sup>22</sup> See above, p. 126.

What interests us now is Schlatter's view that the incarnation establishes a unique Sonship of Jesus, a oneness between the Father and the incarnate Son which must be qualified as a unity of essence. "In John's view, Jesus proceeded in his human life, will and thought from the divine Word, and this not as a formation detaching itself from it [the divine Word] but as one permanently united with it [*nicht als ein von ihm sich ablösendes Gebilde, sondern als bleibend mit ihm geeinigt*]." <sup>23</sup> In this a presence of God in Christ is stated which is clearly distinguished from any other presence of God in the realm of creation.

John achieved this by saying of believers that the Spirit was with them, and of Jesus that he was the Word. And even in the portrayal of Jesus' earthly ministry, the concept of the Spirit did not completely prevent the notion that what was in view was merely a limited, isolated movement by a divine impulse, an inspiration by which individual words were received from God and individual works done with God. For the concept of Spirit was easily emptied to denote mere 'power.' In John, however, Jesus' majesty does not consist of individual deeds he performs, but of the continual unity of his personal life with God. Among existing terms to describe the persistent presence of God in Jesus, by which he shaped him in his conscious existence and revealed himself through him, John knew none so apt as that of 'the Word.' <sup>24</sup>

To say that the *Word* became flesh means, therefore, to ensure that "the human being that originates in such a way stands in complete communion with God and possesses God's glory;" "that Jesus' person belongs to God's essence [*Wesen*] and life; that he, consequently, carries God's fullness of light and life in himself, and this in order to disclose and mediate the latter to the world." <sup>25</sup> The "divine life" is not subject to a process of becoming in Jesus, rather: "He is it, he has it." <sup>26</sup> In this connection, Jesus' "perfect unity of essence [*Wesensgemeinschaft*] with God," that is his deity, is expressed in terms of pre-existence and eternity. <sup>27</sup>

<sup>23</sup> *Theologie der Apostel*, 165. Köstenberger's translation of the second half of the sentence is rather misleading and does not capture the point Schlatter wants to make: ". . . and Jesus' humanness was for him not merely a temporary shell but an abiding, integrated whole" (*Theology of the Apostles*, 135).

<sup>24</sup> *Theology of the Apostles*, 136.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 135; "Wort," 830 (in above order).

<sup>26</sup> "Muß ich nicht sein?," 147; cf. *Theologie des NT I*, 482-84.

<sup>27</sup> See especially *Theologie des NT I*, 454; *History of the Christ*, 30 (with reference to Jn 3:13, 31; 17:5, 24; 8:58; Mt 28:19); *Jesu Gottheit*, 32 ("In that eternity is ascribed to him, deity is predicated about him.").

What is done by God in history and time contains a *being*. His Word was in the beginning: it did not originate when the world began and man heard it; it is not a product of history. . . . The Son does not come into being but *is* before Abraham was, and his relationship with God is immutable.<sup>28</sup>

The Word, which brings forth Jesus' 'I,' is from God and, therefore, eternal. Consequently, Schlatter outlines, "that which the earthly Christ is, is one with that which God is." Jesus "has an eternal 'I'" and "is authorised to speak an 'I am.'"<sup>29</sup>

#### b) The creative agency of the Holy Spirit

Schlatter ascribes a specific role to the Holy Spirit in the birth of the Son of God. This role is one of mediation: God's creative agency in the incarnation of the eternal Son takes place through the Holy Spirit who generates the baby Jesus in the womb of the virgin Mary.<sup>30</sup> The New Testament makes clear, Schlatter expounds, "that the first beginning of Jesus was worked by the Holy Spirit, that we are dealing here with a human life that came about through the creative force of the divine Spirit, that Jesus in his whole existence – in body and soul – is the formation [*Gebilde*] of the Spirit."<sup>31</sup> Through this the ontological dependence of the incarnate Son upon the Father is pneumatologically specified as the completeness in which Jesus is the creation of the Holy Spirit. It is in this completeness that Schlatter discerns the ground of Jesus' unique Sonship.<sup>32</sup> This is to say that "the generation through the Spirit founds Jesus' divine Sonship and holiness as communion [*Verbundenheit*] with God."<sup>33</sup>

<sup>28</sup> *Theology of the Apostles*, 132.

<sup>29</sup> *Dogma*, 334. See further *History of the Christ*, 29-34; *Theologie des NT I*, 454-62; *Theology of the Apostles*, 132-35; 254-56.

<sup>30</sup> See *Theologie des NT I*, 478; *Dogma*, 332; *Kennen wir Jesus?*, 53; *Marienreden*, 7-9; "Neue Testament," 108-09.

<sup>31</sup> "Bekenntnis zur Gottheit Jesu," 41-42. The same statement occurs almost literally in "Sünde gegen den heiligen Geist," 76.

<sup>32</sup> See *Theology of the Apostles*, 78.

<sup>33</sup> *Dogma*, 333.

In this way Schlatter explicitly dissociates himself from that type of Spirit christology according to which Jesus Sonship came about at a later point in his life, for example at his baptism or through some other event. Against such adoptionist notions, Schlatter argues that divine Sonship must not be reduced to a "dynamic connection between Jesus and God" in which a divine force is operative in the former.<sup>34</sup> It is not the case "that the course of nature and history forms a suitable man in which he [God] puts his Spirit and, then, thankfully makes use of his help." To posit such a dependence of God upon man carries in itself the denial of God. Divine Sonship is the gift of the Father and therefore "not . . . the fruit of his [Jesus'] own piety,"<sup>35</sup> even if that piety is enabled by the Holy Spirit. Divine Sonship is "not 'appropriated by Jesus' because, according to the Gospel, God does not lay his gift in a man suitable for him but creates the same himself."<sup>36</sup> Schlatter draws a clear line of demarcation in this connection: it is not the case that "the Father is made the Father through the Son," rather "the Son is made the Son through the Father."<sup>37</sup>

#### c) Concluding observations

For the further course of our christological inquiry it is crucial to bring two interlocking aspects of Schlatter's concept of divine Sonship to our attention. Through his high doctrine of the incarnation Schlatter knows of a persistent [*beharrende*], immutable and therefore, substantial presence of the deity in Jesus. The predication of Jesus' divine Sonship has ontological content in Schlatter. Jesus *is* the Son of God in an indelible and substantial manner – and as such, consubstantial with the Father. Yet Schlatter refrains from reducing

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<sup>34</sup> See *ibid.*, 336.

<sup>35</sup> "Neue Testament," 108.

<sup>36</sup> *Furcht vor dem Denken*, 12-13; cf. *ibid.*, pp. 44, 45.

<sup>37</sup> "Neue Testament," 108.

Jesus' deity to a static possession of a divine nature. Rather, he answers the question about the actuality of Christ's divine being by referring to divine Sonship as the relation in which the Father actively gives deity to the incarnate Son. This conceptual possibility emerges because Schlatter moves from a binitarian to a trinitarian understanding of the incarnation. The Holy Spirit mediates the Father's action and relation to the incarnate Son by means of which the latter is constituted in his divine being. The onto-constitutive quality of this pneumatically mediated action and relation is grounded in the divine loving and giving. Hence, Schlatter can speak of the Godhead as "that which gives [*das Gebende*] – and what it gives [to Jesus] is deity."<sup>38</sup>

Divinity is exclusively God's own will and act. If the man Jesus has it, it is not his through the movement of man towards God, but through the movement of God towards man; not through the development of man, who extends himself to the deity, but through the condescendence of God in which he descends to man. It is not that man assumes God, but that God assumes man.<sup>39</sup>

Because Schlatter interprets the divine action in – and relation to – Jesus ontologically, he cannot conceive of either in contradiction to Jesus' divine being. Put differently, Schlatter does not reduce divine Sonship to a relation between God and the man Jesus, in which the latter exercises divine functions – precisely because he takes relation seriously. This togetherness of being and action, being and relation – indeed, as we saw, *Logos* and *Pneuma*, incarnation and inspiration – will continue to concern us during the remainder of our christological inquiry.

## ii. Incarnation and the gift of humanity

In the same way as his divinity is the creative gift of God, so is Jesus' humanity. Schlatter states: "I regard it as important for the understanding of the deity of Jesus that we

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<sup>38</sup> *Dogma*, 355.

<sup>39</sup> "Bekenntnis zur Gottheit Jesu," 33; similarly in *Dogma*, 336.

pay attention to that which is so strongly emphasised by the Gospels, namely that the deity is that which forms, builds and creates the humanity of Jesus."<sup>40</sup> Central to this notion of the *enhypostasia* of Christ's humanity is the idea of action, of an "effective relationship" of the deity to humanity, "so that the agency of God generates and rules the humanity of Jesus." This agency is mediated through the Word and the Spirit:

God's agency is directed toward the humanity of Jesus through the Spirit as well as through the Word so that it [the humanity] receives its existence and history through him [God]. In that he [Jesus] came into being through the Spirit, he received his being, his will and his power from the Spirit. In that the Word here brings forth flesh – that is a human life including its natural substrate – Jesus is, from the beginning of his life, constituted through divine activity.<sup>41</sup>

When Schlatter speaks of God's creative agency in this context, he gains that dynamic which he critiques "Greek christology" as lacking – divinity and humanity are no longer "two static things alongside each other,"<sup>42</sup> rather, the agency of the former brings forth the being of the latter.

#### a) Jesus' humanity and the act of the eternal Logos

In Schlatter, the eternal Word of God is the causal power which creates and determines Jesus' humanity. "In that the Word became flesh, the humanity of Jesus was generated through the divine Word and, therefore, serves the same as its place and organ."<sup>43</sup> Schlatter articulates this agency of the Word as personal agency in terms of will and love. John's use of "Word" indicates, as Schlatter expounds, that "he grounded the human person of Jesus not in [God's] nature or God's power but in the wisdom and love of God."<sup>44</sup> In this connection Schlatter speaks of a "union of will [*Willensverband*]" between Jesus' deity and

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<sup>40</sup> "Bekenntnis zur Gottheit Jesu," 43.

<sup>41</sup> *Dogma*, 336.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 338.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Theology of the Apostles*, 136.

humanity. "Jesus' humanness is willed by the deity and therefore also brought forth, 'assumed' . . . however, not in such a way that we should conceive of this assuming in terms of a passive 'having-to-itself' [*Ansichhaben*]. Rather, Jesus' humanness has the full 'Yes' of the deity for itself . . ."<sup>45</sup> Along these lines, Schlatter understands the *kenosis* of the eternal Son as the volitional and self-determined condescension to human estate. The incarnation does not take place in the absence or at the expense of his deity, but in the full actuation of the same.

From his participation in God's power to effect creation Jesus enters life in the flesh through God's will. God sent his Son in the likeness of flesh (Rom. 8:3; Gal. 4:4). Corresponding to the divine will is the will of Christ, who, in unity with God's will, was intent not on equality with God but on human existence: he emptied himself (Phil. 2:6-8). Paul derived the origin of Christ and his taking on human likeness not from a natural destiny or compulsion, to which God was subjected or to which he subjected Christ, but conceived of it in terms of a free act that occurs because Christ wills to be what we are, desiring human likeness and the position of slave as they characterize us.<sup>46</sup>

We note that Schlatter outlines Jesus' humanity as the outcome of an act which is grounded in *the will of the Son to be other than God*. In accordance with the will of the Father, the Son "willed not to grasp at equality [*Gleichheit*] with God but willed to be subject to every natural and spiritual order which is given to man." This active renunciation is part of the deity of the Son. Therefore, the assumption of humanity does not stand in contrast to Christ's deity but requires the same: "He had the glory of God, had the being of God, yet *through the deity, not in spite of the same*, he had the will to carry the form [*Gestalt*] of the slave although he was in the form of God" (emphasis A. L.).<sup>47</sup> For it is "as the Son" that he "enters into this 'being-other' than God."<sup>48</sup> Schlatter's idea that the personal communion be-

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<sup>45</sup> *Dogma*, 338.

<sup>46</sup> *Theology of the Apostles*, 257. The whole section (pp. 257-60) is important in this connection. See also Schlatter's exegesis of Phil 2:5-8 in *Erläuterungen II*, 628-31.

<sup>47</sup> "Bekenntnis zur Gottheit Jesu," 45. Cf. Gunton, *Christ and Creation*, 84: "*Infinitum capax finiti*. In the incarnation the being of the Son expresses itself, is laid out in all its fullness, because in his self-emptying the Son is most fully divine. The eternal triune love of God takes historical shape in what is at once the sending by the Father, the Son's self-giving to death, and the enabling of the Spirit."

<sup>48</sup> *Jesu Gottheit*, 40.



tween Father and Son constitutes the enabling ground for the humanity of the latter will continue to come into focus.<sup>49</sup>

#### b) The humanising agency of the Holy Spirit

The divine agency which brings forth the humanity of the Son is mediated by the Holy Spirit in a special way. We count it as one of the most remarkable ideas in Schlatter's christology that the Holy Spirit not only establishes the oneness between Jesus and the Godhead, but also the full reality and particularity of Jesus as a human creature. "Docetic thoughts do not arise from the gospel account. That which was brought into existence through the Spirit was a real child."<sup>50</sup> In Schlatter, the creative agency of the Spirit correlates to the actuality of Christ's human existence in otherness vis-à-vis God.

In him [Jesus] we see the fullness of the Spirit, and the Spirit creates in him humanity in all its fullness. It [humanity] arises from the Spirit as that which is wanted by God, and therefore, it is brought to vivacious activity so that it serves him [God]. So the humanity of the God-man is not drained to a state of lack of awareness and passivity, but rather is called and empowered to act. By this means the grace of God is carried into the world.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> This is the point at which the parallels between Schlatter and Pannenberg originate. Pannenberg establishes a systematic link between "the thought of kenosis" and "the eternal uniqueness of the Son as such in his relation to the Father." Thus, "the incarnation of the Logos" is conceived of as "the self-emptying of the eternal Son in his self-distinction from the Father." Pannenberg concludes: "[T]he self-emptying of the Pre-existent is to be understood as a renunciation not of his divine essence but simply of any equating of himself with the Father. By distinguishing the Father from himself as the one God, the Son certainly moved out of the unity of the deity and became man. But in so doing he actively expressed his divine essence as the Son. The self-emptying of the Preexistent is not a surrender or negation of his deity as the Son. It is its activation" (*Systematic Theology*, vol. II, 377-78). Barth – albeit in his own way which is determined by his doctrine of election – comes to similar conclusions: "It is not at the expense but in the exercise of His Godhead that for the sake of all flesh His Word becomes flesh." (*Church Dogmatics* 4. 1. 532-33). We owe this reference to Weber, *Foundations of Dogmatics*, vol. II, 23 n. 78.

<sup>50</sup> *Dogma*, 333.

<sup>51</sup> *Dogma*, 365-66. Schlatter's understanding of the specific role of the Holy Spirit is very similar to the way in which Gunton stresses the action of the Holy Spirit in this context. Gunton, drawing on basic christological insights of the English Puritan, John Owen, and the Scottish theologian, Edward Irving, calls for "a greater emphasis in the action of the Holy Spirit towards Jesus as the source of the *particularity* and so historicity of his humanity" (*The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 69). The tendency of underplaying the humanity of Christ, which Gunton discerns in the *enhypostasia* teaching as well as in the notion of *communicatio idiomatum* can be obviated "if we give a more prominent place than has been the case to the place of the Holy Spirit in christology" (*Christ and Creation*, 50; see further *ibid.*, 50-59; "Christology: Two Dogmas Revisited," 161-64; "Creation and Mediation," 84-86).

The role of the Holy Spirit in this connection can be defined as a humanising and personalising activity which prevents the incarnate Son from becoming merely "a vessel of the divine power."<sup>52</sup> Schlatter underlines: "What God's force creates here is a man – not something about him, but [the man] himself, including his thinking and willing. However, God treats a human 'I' not as an object for the actuation of his force, but is himself, through his thinking and willing, with it and in it."<sup>53</sup> The mediation of God's personal relation to and action upon the incarnate Son through the person of the Spirit is the ontological basis for Christ's human personhood. Hence, the miracle of the person of Christ is, as Schlatter formulates it, "the miracle of the pneumatic action of God at its highest level. All this is about the formation of a human self through God, about the fact that God becomes the root of human volition and thinking, of human personhood – and creates its natural basis."<sup>54</sup>

c) Christ assumed the nature of fallen man

Based on the thoughts just outlined Schlatter cannot picture Christ's humanity and divinity in contrastive terms. His notion of the action of the Word and the Spirit towards Jesus leads him to the full affirmation of Christ's humanity. To say that Jesus shared the same human nature with us, that he lived in the same flesh in which all men live,<sup>55</sup> means for Schlatter to affirm the concreteness and particularity of Jesus' humanity.

The Spirit generates out of himself the human 'I.' He does not bestow divine 'attributes' on him – an idea that, taken seriously, destroys the humanity of Jesus. It is just the opposite, he [the Spirit] gives him [Jesus] the full distinctiveness of a human being, indeed, of a single man, a Palestinian Jew of the first century. The deity befits the man from Nazareth.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> *Theology of the Apostles*, 371.

<sup>53</sup> *Dogma*, 337.

<sup>54</sup> "Bekenntnis zur Gottheit Jesu," 44. Cf. *Dogma*, 340.

<sup>55</sup> See e.g. *Dogma*, 312.

<sup>56</sup> "Bekenntnis zur Gottheit Jesu," 44.

Jesus fully affirmed the human form of life when he "took the place which history had prepared for him and which individualised him."<sup>57</sup> Consequently, the incarnate Son of God stands in continuity with everything that marks the human creature. Concerning the natural, that is, bodily life of man, Schlatter specifies this continuity in the sense that Jesus is "at home in nature," and is "subject to its orders."<sup>58</sup> Schlatter makes the same point about Jesus' historic and social existence.

He [Jesus] did not enter a world completely forsaken by God; neither was it [the world] connected with God through nature only, but there already existed, prior to him [Jesus], a community which was the work of that grace which grants man the knowledge of God and his service. Therefore, in the same way as he affirmed God's activity which creates nature by possessing the human nature, he also sanctified the divine grace, which reveals itself to us human beings, in that he was a Jew.<sup>59</sup>

Schlatter's concept of a non-competitive relation between Jesus' divine Sonship and his human particularity is aptly summarised in the following sentences:

Therefore, I saw the Jew in Jesus, not although I saw the Son of God in him, and [I saw] the Son of God, not although he was a Jew. Rather, he stood before me as God's work because with every movement of his soul he felt in a Jewish way, thought in a Jewish way and willed in a Jewish way. For God works history, and the completeness of his grace is revealed in that he brings forth the fully defined being. Only in this way do we really have a God who is ours.<sup>60</sup>

Schlatter is pushing the authenticity of Jesus' humanity to its limits when he outlines that the incarnate Son took on the humanity of fallen man.

[T]he life-stage [*Lebensstufe*] of sinful man is given space in the deity. It is not a new primordial human being [*Urmensch*] that is generated through it [the deity], not some paradise-figure, but someone who has the measure of what is fallen to himself, and who is naturally and historically placed at the spot that has been prepared for him through the sinful history of humankind and especially of the Jews.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>57</sup> *Dogma*, 312; similarly *ibid.*, 283-84.

<sup>58</sup> *Gründe*, 66.

<sup>59</sup> *Dogma*, 326-27. The whole section "*Die jüdische Art Jesu*" (pp. 326-31) is illuminating in this connection. See further *\*Wesen und Quellen*, 121-73; *Jesus und Paulus*, 17-18; "Zweifel an der Messianität," 158-59; "Gott der Patriarchen," 85-87; "Prophetische Zeugnis," 97-98.

<sup>60</sup> *Rückblick*, 52.

<sup>61</sup> "Bekenntnis zur Gottheit Jesu," 45. Schlatter refers in this context to Ro 8:3 and Gal 4:4. See also *Jesu Gottheit*, 31-23; "Christi Versöhnen," 195, 205.

In Schlatter's view, the radical *kenosis* of God's Son results in his partaking of human weakness, suffering, temptation and limitation of consciousness.<sup>62</sup> To give an example, Schlatter takes seriously the fact that Jesus did not have absolute knowledge of history and the future.<sup>63</sup> Based on Jesus' words in Mt 16:28 Schlatter states that "God's government has not only affirmed but also corrected the prophetic word of Jesus."<sup>64</sup> For Schlatter, the notion of *kenosis* achieves its full sense only when Christ's incarnation is interpreted as the "conformation [*Gleichgestaltung*] with sinners." Schlatter defines this conformation in a radical way as "the narrowness; the pressure; the derangement of consciousness; the wretchedness of thinking; the limitation of capability, all of which are the lot of the world of the sinner – in one word, our whole intellectual, moral and physical impotence."<sup>65</sup> Such statements, however, must not be interpreted in the sense that Schlatter no longer upholds the sinlessness of Christ. As we shall see in a few moments, Schlatter perceives the greatness of Christ's life and work in the fact that he – in the full reality of fallen manhood – lived in perfect communion with God.

### iii. Concluding observations

In Schlatter, the incarnation of the eternal Word, which is the eternal Son of God, is the complete union of the deity with the humanity in Jesus. This means that in Jesus we are dealing with the one Son of God and, therefore, with God himself. In this sense, Schlatter clearly affirms the notion of *logos ensarkos*: "The rule: 'The Word not outside the flesh and the flesh not outside the Word' is right if it describes the union of the humanity of Jesus

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<sup>62</sup> See *Theology of the Apostles*, 257.

<sup>63</sup> See *Dogma*, 319-20.

<sup>64</sup> "Bekenntnis zur Gottheit Jesu," 47-48; similarly in *Erläuterungen I*, 193.

<sup>65</sup> "Bekenntnis zur Gottheit Jesu," 45.

with the divine Word as complete . . ."<sup>66</sup> Through this, Schlatter rules out that Jesus – concerning his own person – distinguished

between something temporal and something eternal, something human and something divine. He rather claimed that he, as a unified person, participated in God's eternity. He did not single out individual thoughts as given to him by the Father nor individual decisions as worked in him by God. He also did not use one of the concepts dispersed by gnosticism, that is, that in him a preexistent soul or a heavenly spirit or a divine power was present.<sup>67</sup>

Schlatter is aware that the notion of the perfect union of deity and humanity in the incarnate Son must be safeguarded against undermining the humanity of Christ. This conceptual securing is accomplished through Schlatter's trinitarian understanding of the incarnation in which special emphasis is given to the work of the Holy Spirit. Rather than reducing the incarnation to an act of the Son, Schlatter understands the communion of Father, Son and Holy Spirit a) as the place where the humanity of the Son originates: the Son – not intent on equality with God – wills to become man in accordance with the will of the Father; and b) as the actional mode in which the incarnation of the Son takes place: the Father sends the Son in the form of sinful flesh, the eternal Word assumes flesh and the Holy Spirit mediates the onto-constitutive agency and relation between the Father and the incarnate Son.<sup>68</sup> Schlatter's employment of the trinitarian relations enables him, therefore, to hold together what otherwise seems to be mutually exclusive. The eternal identity of the Son, who existed before Abraham was, does not exclude the spatio-temporal realisation of the being of the Son, which begins when the Word becomes flesh. Likewise, the deity of the Son does not exclude his humanity.

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<sup>66</sup> *Dogma*, 587-88.

<sup>67</sup> *History of the Christ*, 30.

<sup>68</sup> It is interesting to see the proximity between Schlatter's concept of the incarnation and that of the Scottish theologian Edward Irving. Without trying to evade the differences between them, which cannot be outlined here, the way in which Irving pictures the incarnation as a triune act reminds us of Schlatter's approach: "He [the Son] submits Himself unto His Father to be made flesh; His Father sendeth the Holy Spirit to prepare Him a body . . . and thus, by creative act of Father, Son and Holy Ghost, not by ordinary generation, Christ is constituted a Divine and human nature in one person" (*The Collected Writings of Edward Irving in Five Volumes* [London: Alexander Strachan, 1865], vol. 5, 159; quoted in Gunton, "Christology: Two Dogmas Revisited," 155). See further McFarlane, *Christ and the Spirit*, 161-63.

The conceptual space between humanity and deity secures both the authenticity of Christ's humanness and God's identity and superiority. According to Schlatter, Jesus did not teach "a promiscuous commingling with God, as if he felt merged with God, dissolved in God, or had absorbed God into himself." In the incarnation, humanity is neither eternalised, nor is the deity temporalised. Rather, Jesus "understood God's effect on him in the unity of his person and in his complete humanity in such a way as to view what he was as God's property."<sup>69</sup> God is consistently conceived of as the one who gives being and life to the incarnate Son. The union of God and man in Jesus does not, therefore, put both on the same level so that the Godhead would be locked in Jesus' humanness. Rather, in Christ,

a personal deity is revealed to us, who is, however, not clenched by the law of humanness. The Father in his complete divine glory remains above the Son who is one with him. The deity stands above the Christ and in the Christ. It makes him, rules him, transfigures him and is for him that which gives – and what it gives is deity.<sup>70</sup>

We need to note that Schlatter counters a wrong and one-sided interpretation of the idea of *logos ensarkos* neither through the notion of a *logos asarkos* nor along the lines of the so-called *extra Calvinisticum* of the Reformed tradition, but through a certain understanding of the triune communion between Father, Son and Holy Spirit.<sup>71</sup> Jesus' humanity does not limit the union of the divine Word with the Father.<sup>72</sup> The Father's deity remains "above" the incarnate Son as that which constitutes him in his God-manhood. With these thoughts we have reached the point at which Schlatter's christology a) gives rise to a doctrine of the immanent Trinity and b) assumes its distinctive form – as we will seek to sketch out in the following sections.

<sup>69</sup> *History of the Christ*, 30-31.

<sup>70</sup> *Dogma*, 354; cf. *ibid.*, 340; \**Wesen und Quellen*, 157.

<sup>71</sup> For a similar concept see Greshake, *Der dreieine Gott*, 324.

<sup>72</sup> See "Bekenntnis zur Gottheit Jesu," 33. Schlatter refers to this as a wrong understanding of the idea of *logos ensarkos* (*Dogma*, 587-88).

### C. Divine Sonship in the otherness of a human being

#### i. On the leading questions of Schlatter's christology

##### a) The relation between the incarnation and the concrete history of the Christ

According to the christological material just presented, the incarnate Son lives in two sets of relationship, namely with God and with man. As Schlatter puts it:

Jesus knew himself to be linked with God and with humanity through his origin so that this dual connection gave him the measure of his life and the goal of his work. By 'Son of God' he said that he had his life from and for God. When he simultaneously called himself the Son of Man, he said that he had and wanted to have his life from and for man. While the one name expressed his closeness to God, the other expressed his closeness to man. This double communion determined what he was and did.<sup>73</sup>

The point to see for our purposes is this: the hypostatic union of deity and humanity is, as we saw Schlatter expounding it, the outcome of the interrelation and interaction between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Yet, as the foregoing quote suggests, Schlatter does not limit this aspect to the initial act of the incarnation but applies it to the whole of Christ's life. The God-manhood of Christ is not a static condition which – once established – necessarily causes a respective life. The fact that Jesus "had his divine sonship in the same flesh that mediates to us our sinful passion and weakness and that he hung this same flesh on the cross, raising it to eternal glory at the resurrection," is, according to Schlatter, anything but self-evident. In Christ, we are not dealing with the pre-programmed outcome of the hypostatic union, but with a form (*Gestalt*) of life that is grounded in the same volitional act through which the Son – in accordance with the will of the Father and by the power of the Holy Spirit – assumed the nature of fallen man. Schlatter elaborates

that Paul thought of the earthly Christ even when he stated that Jesus was in the form of God. For he follows up the statement 'he emptied himself' through the second affirmation: 'he humbled himself,' and does not conceive of this as a one-time act that preceded Jesus' history but as his insistent will that determines his entire life up to the cross. He described Jesus' lowliness that rendered him a slave who must obey, not as a condition but as a thing desired by him, and does not say, 'he was lowly because

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<sup>73</sup> *History of the Christ*, 134-35.

he emptied himself,' but sees in Jesus' weakness and subjection his free renunciation whose greatness he measures by Christ's possession of the divine form.<sup>74</sup>

The net effect of the ideas just adumbrated is that Schlatter can no longer see the question of the compatibility of the two natures of Christ – "the analysis of his being"<sup>75</sup> – as the central issue in christology. Rather, the christological question, "Who is Jesus Christ?," needs to be answered with reference to the relationships in which he lives, for the latter are constitutive of Christ's being and work. As Schlatter puts it, "the question of how a divine and a human nature can be one in Jesus' person" is something which "can deeply occupy us. However, it tends to screen off "the essential miracle in Jesus . . . the miracle which lies in his will; how he could, and can, love God with all his heart and, at the same time, love the world."<sup>76</sup> Therefore, the concept of the incarnation as the establishment of the hypostatic union of deity and humanity must not result in disregarding the particular life and story of Jesus – as is the case, Schlatter critiques, with Greek christology. Rather, christology must be grounded in the history of the Christ, as it is told in the Gospels, and ask how divine Sonship is enacted and realised in the creaturely concreteness, particularity and otherness of manhood – indeed, of fallen manhood.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> *Theology of the Apostles*, 258. Along these lines Schlatter distinguishes between the christological categories of 'nature' and 'form' (ibid., 259). See further *Dogma*, 339-40.

<sup>75</sup> *Dogma*, 335.

<sup>76</sup> "Christi Versöhnen," 196; the whole passage is crucial in this context (pp. 195-96): "That he is simultaneously connected with the Holy God and with evil man, that is the miracle of his course of life." It is worth noting the affinity between Schlatter's concept and key aspects of Schwöbel's essay "Christology and Trinitarian Thought," pp. 139-44. Two points deserve closer attention: a) Schwöbel describes the identity of Jesus Christ "as the union of the person of the Son who is constituted as the Son through his relation to the Father in the Spirit with the humanity of Jesus which is constituted in its relational structure precisely through its hypostatic participation in the person of the Son in its relations to the Father and the Spirit." The being of the incarnate Son "is to be in two sets of relationships." b) According to Schwöbel, the christological question does not concern the compatibility of the two natures, but the enactment of divine Sonship in Jesus' human life. The answer to this question lies in the biblical account of "the story of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ." The difference between Schwöbel and Schlatter comes to the fore when the former argues that such a trinitarian Christology means a "paradigm shift from natures to persons, from substance metaphysics to a metaphysics of relations." As shall become clear in due course, such a polarisation of substance and relation is – given Schlatter's critique of the doctrine of the two natures – not part of his christology.

<sup>77</sup> See e.g. *Dogma*, 334-35, 338.



That means: we ask the question about the relation of the Godhead to the 'I' of Jesus, about the nature and measure of his unity with God. We ask . . . whether God's relation to him is essentially and qualitatively distinct from our fellowship with God and establishes a unity which grants him unity of essence with God and thus creates the God-man.<sup>78</sup>

In conclusion we may say: that which is ontologically the case – namely that the inter-relation and interaction between Father, Son and Holy Spirit brings forth the human otherness of the Son – is applied on the noetic level. The actional orientation of God towards the humanity of the Son, which is the specific work of the Holy Spirit, gives Schlatter's christology a noetic directedness towards the concrete life of the incarnate Son. With reference to 1Jn 4:2, Schlatter expounds that the Spirit does not lead us away from, or beyond, Christ's *Fleischsgestalt* thereby rendering his human life indifferent to us.

Rather, John sees the gift and characteristic of the divine Spirit in that we – in the one who carried the same flesh on himself as we do – know the one who came from above and was sent by the Father. The first thing that we know about Jesus – not merely through our natural knowledge but also and not less so in the school of the Holy Spirit – is that he was what we are. Consequently, the question that the New Testament poses to us is this: Is divinity revealed in this human person? What about this man compels us to affirm the divine being as his essence?<sup>79</sup>

Consequently, Schlatter does not separate the doctrine of the person and the doctrine of the work of Christ from each other for which reason he entitles his christology "*Das Werk Jesu*."<sup>80</sup> For he is convinced that "Christology and soteriology must not be separated from each other. Rather, they become woven into each other. Who Christ is, is demonstrated by the goods [*Güter*] which he gives, and what the goods he gives are, is elucidated by who he is."<sup>81</sup>

<sup>78</sup> *Jesu Gottheit*, 12.

<sup>79</sup> "Bekenntnis zur Gottheit Jesu," 33.

<sup>80</sup> See *Dogma*, 280-356; cf. Rieger, *Rechtfertigungslehre*, 307.

<sup>81</sup> \**Christologie*, 2; similarly in *Wort und Wahrnehmung*, 103.

b) The centrality of the concept of Jesus' divine Sonship

According to Schlatter, Jesus' deity and messianity do not merely consist in that the beginning of his life was worked through God's creative willing and acting. Rather, "the whole course of his life is shaped by God, so that the 'I' of Christ is permanently formed, filled and moved by his deity."<sup>82</sup> Therefore, if we want to know who Christ is, the primary thing to which we have to pay attention is "the way in which God was present in him."<sup>83</sup> Jesus receives his life from God, and this is, as Schlatter elaborates, one of the central aspects of the New Testament concept of Jesus' Sonship of God. In using the term 'Son,' Jesus "referred not to what he had made himself to be, but to what God had made him. By calling himself the Son of God he derived, with complete assurance, his existence and his will, his vocation and his success, from God."<sup>84</sup> It is "God's Fatherhood in the power of which Jesus lives as his Son."<sup>85</sup> The ground and grammar of this relationship is the divine love.<sup>86</sup>

Jesus possesses sonship of God in the personal realm of his being that is illumined by consciousness, not by a transfer of power or a communion of substance with God, which might tie him to God beneath or alongside God's personhood without actually touching it. On this point, John's pronouncements have a deliberate clarity, because he seeks to distance the concept of a God-man, which he shows Jesus to be, entirely from gnostic, magical connotations. Jesus' sonship provides him with a share in God's love and thus also in his power, and the uniqueness of his sonship results in the fact that this share amounts to perfect communion. God's love that is given to him provides him with the ability of collaborating with God to an unlimited degree, and, since it is based on God's love, this collaboration is predicated upon the fact that the Son truly apprehends and does the Father's will and brings his work to completion. He has sonship because his love is matched by identical obedience. Now there is no work that the Father does not hand over to the Son (5:19-30; 4:34; 8:28-29; 12:49; 14:10).<sup>87</sup>

Along these lines, Schlatter explicates the communion of love – in which the Son fully participates in everything that is the Father's – in terms of a "communion of life." This is to

<sup>82</sup> "Bekenntnis zur Gottheit Jesu," 43.

<sup>83</sup> "Ausgang Jesu," 134-35.

<sup>84</sup> *History of the Christ*, 30; similarly in *Dogma*, 311; *Furcht vor dem Denken*, 13, 54.

<sup>85</sup> *Kennen wir Jesus?*, 29.

<sup>86</sup> See e.g. *Glaube*, 231-34.

<sup>87</sup> *Theology of the Apostles*, 130.

say that the Son receives his thoughts and words from the Father.<sup>88</sup> He is with God and in God as his Father; is known, willed and loved by the Father.<sup>89</sup> The "communion of life" is also a "communion of willing" in which the Son receives his will through the Father's will.<sup>90</sup> Finally, the communion of Father and Son is a communion of power and acting: "The closeness with God he felt as sonship did not consist merely in the fact that God gave him norms for his will. Jesus ascribed to himself a complete communion of will with the Father that was a communion of life and therefore also gave him part in the Father's power and activity."<sup>91</sup>

Schlatter is keen to show that the dependence of the Son upon the Father neither undermines Christ's personhood nor renders him an inanimate instrument of the Father. Rather, precisely because it is a communion of *love*, the relation and action between the Father and the Son constitutes the continuous ground for the true being and life of the Son.

However, the being which comes about through the relationship with God is, for Jesus, neither empty nor comparable to the existence of things, but is life. The statement of the Son: 'I am,' is one with 'I live,' and life takes place in willing and acting – for which reason Jesus possesses his Sonship through that which he does.<sup>92</sup>

The Father's action upon – and in – the Son enables the latter to be truly active himself. This non-competitive relation between the Father and the Son culminates in Schlatter's idea that the Son – in the full particularity and distinctness of his human life – is empowered to work the works of the Father. "As the Son, he knew that the Father gave him his complete love, and this love was perfected by his work in him so that his work was accomplished

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<sup>88</sup> *History of the Christ*, 129.

<sup>89</sup> See *Glaube*, 231.

<sup>90</sup> See e.g. "Christi Versöhnen," 192; *Theology of the Apostles*, 130; *History of the Christ*, 126.

<sup>91</sup> *History of the Christ*, 130.

<sup>92</sup> *Theologie des NT I*, 440.

through the Son."<sup>93</sup> Schlatter's concept of the communion of Father and Son is powerfully captured in one of his expositions of Jn 5,17 from which we quote here at length:

And because God works, the Son says: 'I work.' This would be impossible if God were not the Father. If he were the one and only in the sense that he could not bear anything beside himself, but revealed his power in debilitating and binding everything, then the work of the Son could not emerge from his work. However, he is the Father who gives life to the Son and together with the life he gives to him the capacity to work. His vocation is neither inactivity nor the mere adoring contemplation of what the Father works. He works himself; but how can he work if the Father does not work? In the same way as inactivity is impossible for him – because the Father works, arbitrary acting which is not grounded in the work of the Father is impossible for him. His relationship to the Father is communion which reveals itself in the commonality of acting so that the work of the Father takes place in the work of the Son.<sup>94</sup>

The crucial point for the further course of our christological inquiry is this: in the personal communion of love between the Father and the incarnate Son, the dependence of the latter finds his *Selbständigkeit* in which he acts himself, indeed, is empowered to act with divine authority and work the deeds of the Father. Schlatter explains:

Through these acts his sonship was revealed. Since he performed them through God's power and grace, they revealed the unhindered wholeness of his relationship to the Father. . . . Therefore the accounts emphasize both: that the work Jesus did was received by him, and that they were his works rather than appearing beyond, beside, or above him.<sup>95</sup>

Because – through the communion of love – the Son is constituted to be and act as the Son vis-à-vis the Father, that very relationship of Sonship requires the agency of the Son as personal "other". Schlatter argues that – for reason of its personal nature –

the Sonship of Jesus becomes an ethical event [*Vorgang*]. The Father counts on the will of the Son and the latter gives it to him. His obeying and loving is not merely a consequence of, and supplement to, his dignity in being Son and Christ. Rather, it is through his loving and obeying that he is Son and Christ.<sup>96</sup>

In other words, the Son "has his life from God and for God."<sup>97</sup> The second movement, however, does not take place by coercive necessity caused through a divine substance or power in Jesus, but as a filial act of love, will and obedience in which the Son freely re-

<sup>93</sup> *History of the Christ*, 126.

<sup>94</sup> *Andachten*, 34; similarly in *Theologie des NT I*, 305.

<sup>95</sup> *History of the Christ*, 185; cf. *Theologie des NT I*, 306.

<sup>96</sup> *Glaube*, 233-34.

<sup>97</sup> *Theology of the Apostles*, 130.

sponds to the Father by giving back the life which he receives from him. And precisely for this reason, as Schlatter outlines, it became Jesus' "task to prove his divine sonship in the temptation . . . For divine substances or powers are not subject to temptation but create their effects to the extent they are present of necessity. Only will is tempted, not powers."<sup>98</sup>

c) Schlatter's notion of Jesus' tempted Sonship

According to Schlatter, the central question of the Gospel account of Jesus' temptation is "how he conceived of his divine Sonship and how he used it."<sup>99</sup> Schlatter holds that Jesus – throughout his life – was tempted to "egoistic sonship." Behind this phrase stand different forms of distorted sonship which we now shall succinctly outline.

Egoistic sonship emerges through a gnostic understanding of sonship according to which a heavenly being or a divine power, substance or hypostasis is present in a human being. The result is "a miracle of nature . . . whereby the person thus privileged enjoyed the peculiar phenomenon of his supernatural nature in self-admiration and presented it to others for the same purpose." Applied to Jesus, this means that "he would have made the knowledge of divine activity by which he originated the center of religion and would have required people to admire the divine miracle that stood before them in his person."<sup>100</sup> Jesus' Sonship would have disintegrated into a life "out of himself and for himself [*aus sich und für sich*]." That is, he would have arbitrarily acted by means of his own power in order to display and prove the miraculous union of the divine and human nature in himself. The resulting admiration of his person would have enhanced his own self-esteem.<sup>101</sup> "The gnosti-

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 132.

<sup>99</sup> *History of the Christ*, 88.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 132.

<sup>101</sup> See "Zweifel an der Messianität," 193-94.

cally conceived sonship demands to be admired and needs great success for its validation."<sup>102</sup>

Egoistic sonship also emerges through a mystic understanding of sonship in which Jesus' communion with God would be limited to his inner life "so that it is experienced and enjoyed through a psychic process." The aim of mystic sonship would be a commingling and merging of Jesus and God, the dissolving and absorption of the one into the other. Jesus would give up his own will and lose his own self in order to "enjoy the merging with God" in a moment of "overwhelming sensation."<sup>103</sup>

According to Schlatter, both of the aforementioned concepts stand for "the selfish abuse of his sonship" which Jesus had to reject.<sup>104</sup> Important for our purposes is the observation that Schlatter perceives the consequences of such an abuse not only in the communion between the incarnate Son and the Father but also in the way in which Jesus relates to mankind. If the Son lives egoistically out of himself and for himself he will conceive of his divine Sonship and his humanity in contrastive terms and arbitrarily use his divine power to transcend the limitations of his human existence. As Schlatter puts it, the question throughout Jesus' life was how he – on the grounds of his divine Sonship – conceived of his relationship to humanity. "Did he derive from it his incorporation into human life or his separation from it? Did he, as the Son of God, want to be a human being, with all that origin from humanity entails, or not?"<sup>105</sup>

In a similar way, Schlatter links the Sonship of Jesus and his messianic work. As egoistic Son, Jesus would never have exercised his office as the Christ because the aim of his

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<sup>102</sup> *History of the Christ*, 133.

<sup>103</sup> "Zweifel an der Messianität," 194-95; cf. *Jesu Demut*, 80; *History of the Christ*, 30-31, 57, 85, 133; *Dogma*, 33, 201-02; *Theologie des NT I*, 302.

<sup>104</sup> *History of the Christ*, 91.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

life would not have been outside of, but in, himself. Schlatter expounds that Jesus understood and enacted his Sonship of God in such a way that it included his office as Christ and vice versa.

His [Jesus'] communion with God gave him his vocation, duty and work. Likewise, his work and rule took place completely within the framework of his relationship with God; it was his worship, his religion. Because he understood his sonship messianically and obtained his office through it, he did not conceive of it as an enhancement of his own life and did not make it the subject of his own enjoyment. It became for him the basis for action, since he existed for the community because he was the Son, and what God was for him was revealed in the things he did and provided for humanity. This lent his relationship with God its greatness, because it was not limited to the content of his own life but encompassed all that he must accomplish with man. It conferred depth and strength on his dealings with others, since he had his ground and aim in his communion with the Father.<sup>106</sup>

Because Jesus did not want to act as the Christ outside of his relationship with the Father, he refused to accomplish his messianic work without God and overcame the temptation to "win the world by turning away from the Father."<sup>107</sup> Thus Jesus cast off that popular messianism in which the Christ all too easily replaced the rule of God through his own rule, thereby becoming the antichrist.<sup>108</sup>

## ii. The communion of love between the incarnate Son and the Father

Our brief exploration of the leading questions of Schlatter's christology has brought us to the point at which we begin to see the links between Schlatter's notion of Jesus' Sonship of God and Jesus' humanity and office as Christ.<sup>109</sup> Our objective in the following sections is to systematically present the decisive aspects of Schlatter's understanding of Jesus' Sonship of God which, as we shall see, provide the conceptual ground on which Schlatter argues for Jesus' divine Sonship as the inner basis of his human life.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 126; similarly in "Zweifel an der Messianität," 193, 195-97; *Glaube*, 232-33. See especially Schlatter's coherent presentation in *Theologie des NT I*, 429-43.

<sup>107</sup> *History of the Christ*, 89.

<sup>108</sup> See "Zweifel an der Messianität," 186-87; *Dogma*, 281-82; *History of the Christ*, 89-92, 132; *Jesu Gottheit*, 7.

<sup>109</sup> Schlatter explicitly points to this "inseparability" in *History of the Christ*, 91.

a) The self-distinction of Jesus as the Son from God as his Father

Schlatter understands Jesus' Sonship of God as the personal communion of love between Father and Son. The two elements of unity and distinctness are constitutive of this relationship and must not, according to Schlatter, be conceived of as contradictory. The oneness of Father and Son, in which the Son receives his life from the Father, is the ground of the individuality and *Selbständigkeit* of the Son.

His connection [*Verbundenheit*] with the Father is complete in its content and scope, for it comprises his whole life. Its result is not his impoverishment, emptying and deprivation of rights. Rather, it lifts him up to the Father and places him in the Father so that he lives in the Father as the Father lives in him.<sup>110</sup>

Schlatter explicitly outlines the otherness of the Son as the gift from the Father to the Son.

Where there is Sonship, the distance comes about through the will of the Father who gives individual vivacity [*Lebendigkeit*] to the Son. This [distance] is not a conflict of will but the precondition for and, in turn, the result of, the communion of will and therefore not in need of reconciliation; rather, the Son is immediately, and in complete connection, one with the Father.<sup>111</sup>

Since we are dealing here with one of the most crucial aspects of Schlatter's christology, it seems important to underline once more that, in his view, the idea of the ontological space for the otherness of the Son can only be secured conceptually through the notion of the free and giving love of the Father.

In Jesus' communion with the Father there existed, therefore, a community that did not grow out of the drive of a natural desire. No natural coercion compelled the Father to prepare for himself the Son. Likewise, it is not the emptiness of privation that makes his [the Son's] love desirable to him [the Father], and it is not through his own impotence that is he in need of the Son's service. Just as little is it a law that creates community here, for above God there stands no further duty that binds him. Here community flows out of the fullness of life as the revelation of the will that wants to give because it is love.<sup>112</sup>

Schlatter examines the aforementioned aspects from the perspective of the Son and reaches correlating conclusions. Jesus neither regarded his communion with God as a static condition which he had to endure passively, nor did he attempt to gnostically or mystically

<sup>110</sup> "Letzte Bitte Jesu," 328.

<sup>111</sup> *Jesu Demut*, 84.

<sup>112</sup> "Letzte Bitte Jesu," 328.



dissolve himself in God. Rather, he "stood as 'I' before the 'Thou,' as person before the person of the Father."<sup>113</sup> The Son distinguishes himself from the Father and relates to him as personal other.

His communion with God was a person-to-person exchange, since he saw the Father in divine self-sufficiency [*Selbständigkeit*] over him while at the same time possessing a life of his own [*Eigenleben*]. Therefore his disposition toward God was love, and his closeness to him was the commonality of will that arose because he wanted the will of the Father with all of his own will.<sup>114</sup>

The thrust of these words indicates that Schlatter is particularly concerned with the idea of distinctness. He further specifies the self-distinction of the Son from the Father, expounding that Jesus' "God-consciousness" made him always and simultaneously aware of "his distinctness from, and connection with, the Father." Hence, his will was "to be under, as well as in, the Father – the former not without the latter, the latter not without the former; he wanted to have him as the greater one above himself and to be one with him."<sup>115</sup> The point to see for our purposes is that the Son – having a life of his own, like the Father – does not locate himself on the same level as the Father. Rather, the Son affirms the creative love in which the Father gives life to him. This means that he acknowledges the "*Selbständigkeit* and superiority" of the Father as the one who is greater than himself, and precisely this recognition is, in Schlatter's eyes, "the unavoidable precondition" of Jesus' relationship with the Father.<sup>116</sup> For it is in this volitional subordination that the Sonship of the Son corresponds to the Fatherhood of the Father.<sup>117</sup> Schlatter, we may say, understands the love between Father and Son as a mutual but not symmetrical one. Filial subordination and obedience are those forms of love in which the Son is able to respond to the love of the Father, that is, enter into true communion with the Father, without levelling out the dis-

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<sup>113</sup> *Glaube*, 231; similarly in *Jesu Demut*, 80.

<sup>114</sup> *History of the Christ*, 126.

<sup>115</sup> *Jesu Demut*, 79-80.

<sup>116</sup> See *Theologie des NT I*, 451.

<sup>117</sup> See *ibid.*, 305-06.

tinctness between themselves. "He understands his Sonship as love – not in the sense of a fusion of essence [*Wesensverschmelzung*] but of a community of will, and this in such a way that he affirms the superiority of the Father by making his love his obedience."<sup>118</sup> Therefore, when Jesus calls himself the Son and relates to God as his Father, he affirms both unity and distinctness as essential features of his Sonship. This simultaneousness of distinctness and unity is the characteristic of love.

Jesus' relationship with God was love. It is essential to it [love] that it knows and wills both at the same time: distinctness and connection [*Verbundenheit*]. It has nothing in common with tendencies toward melting or absorption. It consumes neither its subject nor its object, enslaves neither the one who has it nor the one who receives it, but liberates both in that it connects them.<sup>119</sup>

The thoughts just outlined provide the basis upon which Schlatter establishes a systematic link between Jesus' love for God (in which he distinguishes himself as the Son from the Father) and Jesus' subordination to God.

It was Jesus' concept of love alone that led to the fact that the concept of eternity did not cancel out his self-sufficiency [*Selbständigkeit*] in relation to the Father. No leveling [*Vereinerleung*] with God resulted. The clear distinction of his life from God and his entire submission to God remained the characteristics of his communion with him.<sup>120</sup>

Christ's humility, Schlatter states, "originates from the fully personal nature of Jesus' Sonship of God through which he distinguishes his own will from God's will, his own work from God's work, so that the certainty of the 'himself-excelling-greatness' of the Father constitutes the constant precondition of his entire agency."<sup>121</sup> Because Jesus conceives of his relationship with God in terms of Sonship, he regards "complete subordination to God as the essential and indestructible basis of his life."<sup>122</sup> Referring to Mt 19:16-17 and Mk 10:17-18, Schlatter does not see a contrast but rather "the strictest causal relationship" between Jesus' divine Sonship and "his abandonment of his own honor, by which he put him-

<sup>118</sup> "Zweifel an der Messianität," 194. See also *Theology of the Apostles*, 130; *Glaube*, 232.

<sup>119</sup> *Jesu Demut*, 81.

<sup>120</sup> *History of the Christ*, 316.

<sup>121</sup> *Jesu Demut*, 37.

<sup>122</sup> *Theologie des NT I*, 451.

self aside so that God's goodness alone would be believed and God's commandment would be done." In other words, Jesus' subordination, in which he distinguishes himself from God as the only good one, indicates not a deficiency in, but the full actuation of, Sonship of God. Schlatter speaks of "the aliveness of Jesus' divine Sonship" and of "the faithful expression of his filial will [*seines Sohneswillens*]" in this context.<sup>123</sup>

#### b) Concretions of divine Sonship in the life of Jesus

Much could be said about Schlatter's understanding of the concrete form of Jesus' Sonship of God. The constraints of this study make us focus on those aspects which directly contribute to a solution to the questions we are asking. To begin with, Schlatter characterises the love in which the Son corresponds to the fatherly love of God as selfless love:

Because Jesus knew his life – including its entire content – as given by the love of the Father, he did not live for himself. However, in doing this he did not experience the decline of his life but precisely the eternal aliveness with the highest purpose. The selflessness emerges and preserves itself here in that the self gains its most supreme content.<sup>124</sup>

Jesus' selflessness is neither weakness nor poverty nor self-destruction but active *love* for, and confidence in, God so that he "had whatever he was and had as the gift of the Father" thereby not having "his own wealth and success as his goal."<sup>125</sup> Positively stated, he lived from, in and for God. "[T]he foundation and the destiny of his life are in God."<sup>126</sup> On the grounds of this love Jesus dedicated his entire life to God.

Jesus fulfilled the great commandment – to love God with the employment of all of his strength – in that he willed God's honour, God's law and God's reign. He willed this in such a way that he desired no other honour except God's honour, no other rule except God's law, no other reign except God's

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<sup>123</sup> *History of the Christ*, 311; *Jesu Demut*, 50 (in above order); see also *Dogma*, 315-16.

<sup>124</sup> *Jesu Demut*, 81.

<sup>125</sup> *History of the Christ*, 311. See also Schlatter's definition of selflessness *ibid.*, 40 n. 10: "'Selfless' I call not that person who is nothing and has nothing but the one who is everything he is and does through the one from whom and for whom he lives." Cf. *Theologie des NT I*, 451; "Jesu Verhalten," 128.

<sup>126</sup> *Romans*, 144.

reign; and that he received his glory through God's glory, his commandment through God's commandment, his kingdom through God's kingdom.<sup>127</sup>

The notion that Jesus lives a completely God-related life so that the Father is the prime centre of everything the Son is and does is of such importance that Schlatter distinguishes his christology from that of his friend Hermann Cremer at precisely this point: "The distance remains which everywhere comes to the fore in your and my way of unfolding the theological base lines. I myself cannot capture the entire content of the gospels in the relation of the Son to us but hear in the same [gospels] strongly and essentially the *τὰ τοῦ θεοῦ τῷ θεῷ* taking shape from Jesus' will and work."<sup>128</sup>

Schlatter – proceeding especially along Johannine lines – specifies the *active love* of Jesus to his heavenly Father as the "religious ground" which constitutes the *passivity* characteristic of Jesus' life. "The fact that he thought and acted in love to the Father gave him the incapacity to work for himself, to protect himself, to witness for himself – be that in word, work or miracle."<sup>129</sup> Jesus did not selfishly use his divine Sonship for himself when he spoke and acted. "[B]y acting in the selflessness of genuine love" the "arbitrary disposal of himself and the world remained foreign to him." In that he – in his filial acting and speaking – glorified the one God, "he did not commit robbery on that which is God's."<sup>130</sup> Schlatter, in response to Hermann Cremer, summarises: "Certainly, he is the object of religion – this, however, as 'the one and only Son of the Father.'" Schlatter points to the *ἐῖς*

<sup>127</sup> *Theologie des NT I*, 302-03; cf. *History of the Christ*, 126-27; *Ruf Jesu*, 4.

<sup>128</sup> *Wort und Wahrnehmung*, 92-93.

<sup>129</sup> "Zweifel an der Messianität," 192; *Theologie des NT I*, 304 (in above order).

<sup>130</sup> See *History of the Christ*, 91, 188. Unfortunately, the final sentence, which in the German original (*Er beging keinen Raub an dem, was Gottes ist.*) is an allusion to Phil 2:6, does not occur in the English translation (see *Geschichte des Christus*, 246). See also *Jesu Demut*, 68-69.

ἀγαθός (Mt 19:17) and recognises a "grain of truth" in "Harnack's statement that Jesus did not place *himself* into the gospel" <sup>131</sup> Jesus' gospel, Schlatter expounds,

was therefore the proclamation of God's rule, and he did not need to call undue attention to himself. Through the Lord's prayer, he turned his disciples' desire toward God's name, rule, and will, and did not command them to pray: sanctify the name of your Son and bring about the kingdom of your Son. <sup>132</sup>

As interesting as it may be, we cannot enter into the details of Schlatter's understanding of the passivity of Jesus. <sup>133</sup> Important for us to see is that the selflessness and passivity of the incarnate Son originate neither in his weakness nor in his incapacity to will and act himself, but in his love in which he wants to do the will of the Father and complete his work. Therefore, Jesus makes himself dependent on God in that he waits for the reception of the Father's will and work.

He is bound to that which he apprehends and receives in his communion with the Father. His characteristic is the incapacity to do anything by himself. In this Jesus sees the precondition and the rule of his entire activity. He cannot act if the Father does not act; cannot will if the Father does not command him; cannot think if the Father does not teach him. <sup>134</sup>

This includes, so Schlatter, that Jesus "was not elevated beyond that asking which searches for God's will." To affirm his filial dependence means for Jesus that "he – in his own action – remains subordinate to the guidance of the Father." <sup>135</sup> The Son unites his will and work with the will and work of the Father. This activity finds expression in Jesus' prayer. Rather than being "an impairment of his Sonship" the reason for Jesus' prayer lies, according to Schlatter, in the fact that "he bases his relationship with him [the Father] upon the obedience that is grounded in love." <sup>136</sup> The communion of will, word and work is gained through prayer – that is, it does not come about by the coercion of a natural force but through an

<sup>131</sup> *Wort und Wahrnehmung*, 92.

<sup>132</sup> *History of the Christ*, 126-27.

<sup>133</sup> See especially "Zweifel an der Messianität," 188-98; *Theologie des NT I*, 301-19.

<sup>134</sup> *Theologie des NT I*, 306.

<sup>135</sup> *Glaube*, 233.

<sup>136</sup> *Theologie des NT I*, 344; cf. *History of the Christ*, 196.

inner struggle in which Jesus seeks and receives unity with God's will, word and work. Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane is Schlatter's paradigm case in this context.<sup>137</sup>

In that Jesus – "by the free act of obedient love" – "wills what God wills and does what God does," he rejects egoistic Sonship and reveals himself as the true Son who partakes in everything that is the Father's and acts with divine authority.<sup>138</sup> Sonship meant for Jesus "the total affirmation of the divine love, not merely a conditioned or limited participation in God's gift, but rather a completeness of community which finds expression in the words: 'everything is committed to me by the Father.'"<sup>139</sup> Thus, Jesus' possession "arises from his receiving, his power from his selflessness, and his rule from his obedience."<sup>140</sup>

#### c) Jesus' Sonship of God as the inner basis of his humanity

We have now reached the point at which are able to see that Schlatter's concept of Jesus' Sonship of God, as we have outlined it thus far, constitutes the basis on which due conceptual space and weight can be given to the humanity of Christ in all its humility. In Schlatter, the self-distinction, subordination and obedience of the Son, which are essential constituents of his filial communion with the Father, are identical with, and include, the will to live an authentic human life and to sacrifice that life on the cross. We have observed this link already in our presentation of Schlatter's doctrine of the incarnation.<sup>141</sup> The will of the Son in which he did not grasp at equality with God, that is, "by which he seized not divinity but humanity" cannot, therefore, be "condensed . . . into a single transcendent mo-

<sup>137</sup> See *Theologie des NT I*, 311-13; *Dogma*, 314-15.

<sup>138</sup> *History of the Christ*, 130; *Glaube*, 233 (in above order).

<sup>139</sup> *Glaube*, 232. See above, p. 194.

<sup>140</sup> *Theology of the Apostles*, 130; cf. "Jesu Verhalten," 128; *Jesu Gottheit*, 39; *Jesu Demut*, 44-45, 56; *Furcht vor dem Denken*, 54.

<sup>141</sup> See above, p. 184.

ment" but must be conceived of as determining the whole life of Jesus.<sup>142</sup> The submission of the incarnate Son to the one God has to be understood not as a renunciation of his divinity but as a renunciation of what Schlatter calls "egoistic Sonship," that is, the egoistic abuse of divine Sonship for the sake of equation with the Father.

The passage's [Phil 2:6-8] ethical import is not that Paul conceived of Jesus' self-emptying in terms of a loss of nature but that he thought of the selfless renunciation that did not exploit for himself what Jesus owned as his abiding possession on account of God's fatherly regard for him. If he thought thus, he predicated existence in the form of God and existence in the form of man as Jesus' simultaneous possession; yet not the former but the latter is made by him the determinative aspect of his experience and his actions.<sup>143</sup>

Throughout his christological writings Schlatter points to the connection between Jesus' love for God, his denial of egoistic Sonship and his decision to live as human creature in otherness vis-à-vis God as his Father. The twelve years old Jesus, "who so vividly felt, thought and willed in God," did not derive from his communion with the Father "any opposition to the natural order, nor did he opt out of any of the pressure it placed on him. Work for his family did not seem to him a defilement or weakening of his communion with God, but rather its proof."<sup>144</sup> Schlatter's exposition of the temptation account is of fundamental importance in this connection. Through a filial act of "confidence in, obedience to, and love for God" Jesus did not embrace that posture in which he deduced from his divine Sonship the "rejection of suffering," the "full authority to venture every risk" and the grasp "for power by every means." The reflex, so to speak, of his rejection of egoistic Sonship is that the incarnate Son submits himself to the natural and historical concreteness and determinateness of humanity even if that means for him to suffer.

<sup>142</sup> *Theology of the Apostles*, 258; see above, p. 192.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 258.

<sup>144</sup> "Muß ich nicht sein?," 146; cf. *History of the Christ*, 41.

The norms to which Jesus thus subjected himself guided him in his entire work. We find him always in that complete confidence in God that needed nothing else for life than a divine word, and this in such a way that his confidence in the divine life-giving love rendered him free from selfish passion and incapable of anxiety or self-interest, so that he subjected himself to every natural order.<sup>145</sup>

According to the New Testament, "Jesus in conscious and insistent sharpness refused to use his Sonship of God for himself . . . but obtained from it the duty that unites him with humanity."<sup>146</sup> As Jesus' life progressed, Schlatter elaborates, this decision "received ever greater depth and an escalating seriousness, climaxing in his way to the cross. It was, and continually remained, his will to lead a human life in the strength of his communion with God – and precisely because he led this life in communion with God, he was 'the' Son of Man."<sup>147</sup>

The foregoing citations indicate that, in Schlatter's view, Jesus' "will that established his humanity" includes his *Heilandswillen* and his "will to the cross."<sup>148</sup> Jesus' communion with God is the basis on which he works for, and serves, his fellow man, and this work has, in turn, its "indispensable precondition" in Christ's consubstantiality with man.<sup>149</sup>

In John, the Son of God does not come into the world for the sake of presenting his divine nature or a miraculous force, but in order to complete a work which consists in the gathering of the community. That means that he is the Christ. He is there neither for the sake of his own enjoyment nor for the sake of communicating a theory but in order to rule. His rule must not be conceived of as egoism which makes its own exaltation the humiliation of others but as love which helps others to their own share in God and thus liberates them.<sup>150</sup>

Because Jesus neither lived by himself nor for himself but from and to God as his Father, he became the Christ for mankind. As Schlatter puts it, Jesus "lived not for himself but on account of mankind in the Father. His sonship did not pull him away from mankind but

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<sup>145</sup> *History of the Christ*, 91.

<sup>146</sup> "Zweifel an der Messianität," 194.

<sup>147</sup> *History of the Christ*, 135; cf. *Dogma*, 323-24; "Jesu Verhalten," 132-33.

<sup>148</sup> *Theology of the Apostles*, 258.

<sup>149</sup> See *Dogma*, 312.

<sup>150</sup> *Theologie des NT I*, 431.



towards it and rendered him one with it, since he had to complete his work for it."<sup>151</sup> Hence, Jesus' love for God becomes the ground of his love for man so that both are one.<sup>152</sup> Schlatter even takes his argument a step further when he states: "The fact that Jesus' unlimited co-ordination with God not only kept its constant basis in the total subordination to him but also continuously rendered him [Jesus] a servant in relation to man and nature and placed him into equality with us, is the seal of its authenticity."<sup>153</sup>

It would be a promising task to explore Schlatter's doctrine of the cross of Christ along the lines just sketched out. This, however, would carry us beyond the limits of this study.<sup>154</sup> Suffice it to say that, according to Schlatter, the death on the cross marks the climax of Jesus' love for, and active obedience to, God in which he unites his will with the Father's will. The *proprium* of Jesus' death was that "he not only renounced his natural life but surrendered everything: his mission that placed him in the world, his royal right that made him the creator and Lord of the new community, his office as saviour."<sup>155</sup> In other words, Jesus gives himself, including his deity, back to the Father from whom he has received everything he is and does. Yet the cross is an act of giving, obedience and sacrifice because Jesus affirms God as his Father "in the conditions of earthly and guilty man" – that is, as the one who participates in the state of life [*Lebensstand*] of the fallen ones."<sup>156</sup> Jesus adheres to his communion with man before the Father for which reason the gift, obedience and sacrifice of the Son is not answered directly through a correlating act of the Father. "He gives his life but does not instantly receive it back from the Father's love. He remains

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<sup>151</sup> *History of the Christ*, 132.

<sup>152</sup> See *Dogma*, 317; "Jesu Verhalten," 133; "Zweifel an der Messianität," 195.

<sup>153</sup> "Bekenntnis zur Gottheit Jesu," 46.

<sup>154</sup> For an illuminating outline of Schlatter's notion of the death of Christ see Rieger, *Rechtfertigungslehre*, 307-26.

<sup>155</sup> *Opfer*, 12; cf. what Schlatter says about Jesus' "*totale Entselbstigung*" in *Jesu Gottheit*, 63-69.

<sup>156</sup> *Christi Versöhnen*, 205.

with the Father, but the same does not remain with him; he stands by the Father, but the same does not stand by him. He glorifies him while he is being humiliated."<sup>157</sup> Here the self-distinction from the Father reaches its escalating climax because the Son "takes the consequences of sin into his experience: weakness, pain, death and Godforsakenness."<sup>158</sup> In Schlatter, "the renunciation of the *actio ad extra*," that is, the refusal to opt out of his humanity and passion, is a constitutive aspect of Jesus' sacrifice to God and stands as such "in antithesis to our robbery of that which is God's."<sup>159</sup> It is precisely as the one who dies on the cross that Jesus is the Son of God.

The work of Jesus gained its greatness through the fact that he, in the same flesh which by natural coercion brings forth in us a darkened God-consciousness and an egoistically distorted self-consciousness and an 'into-hatred-degenerated' behaviour over against the others, has lived as the Son in God's obedience and at peace with him and the world<sup>160</sup>

In conclusion: Jesus' Sonship of God, in which he participates in everything the Father is and does, stands, according to Schlatter, not in contradiction to his human life in its humble form but rather founds it. Christ's humanity and self-humbling have their inner basis in the self-distinction and subordination as essential constituents of the Son's relationship with the Father. In other words, exactly as this concrete man from Nazareth and in his subordination to God, Jesus is the Son of the heavenly Father.<sup>161</sup> That this notion of Jesus' Sonship of God is conceptually secured through a corresponding understanding of the eternal communion between Father and Son shall become clear in due course.

<sup>157</sup> *Jesu Gottheit*, 66; cf. *Opfer*, 11.

<sup>158</sup> *Christi Versöhnen*, 205. See also *Dogma*, 294; *Jesu Gottheit*, 2-7.

<sup>159</sup> *Wort und Wahrnehmung*, 93; *Jesu Gottheit*, 70 (in above order). See further *ibid.*, 97.

<sup>160</sup> *Dogma*, 312.

<sup>161</sup> Notable is the affinity to Pannenberg's view that "much depends on whether Jesus avoided making himself equal to God. That is, it depends on whether, as a creature of God, he subordinated himself to the imminent rule of God that he announced with just the same unconditionality as he required of others. Only in this subordination to the rule of the one God is he the Son. As he gave his life in service to the rule of God over his creatures – namely, to prepare the way for its acknowledgement – he is as man the Son of the eternal Father. Rejection of any supracreaturely dignity before God shows itself to be a condition of his sonship. It is mediated by his self-humbling (Phil. 2:8)" (*Systematic Theology*, vol. II, 373). For Schlatter's usage of the term "precondition" in the same context see above, pp. 201, 202.

d) Divine Sonship and the agency of the Holy Spirit

Schlatter ascribes a central role to the Holy Spirit in Jesus' life, and this not only applies to the incarnation of the eternal Son of God.<sup>162</sup> For communion with the Father, which ontologically constitutes everything the Son is and does, is mediated through the Holy Spirit. Thus, we are not off the mark to say that, in Schlatter, the Holy Spirit is not only the Spirit of Christ, but that Christ is the Christ of the Spirit. Jesus was "the one born of the Spirit and anointed with the Spirit . . . he was from beginning to end in body and soul the work of the Holy Spirit."<sup>163</sup> The same Spirit, who – in the incarnation – establishes the true otherness of Jesus as the Son vis-à-vis God as his Father, enables the man Jesus to live his life in love and obedience to God so that divine Sonship is actualised in the otherness of a human creature. Examining the events at Jesus' baptism Schlatter states:

By the fact that the sign consisted of the sending of the Spirit and of the attestation of his Sonship, his internal relationship with God, which determined his personal existence, was made the foundation of his entire work. The prospect of his rule was opened up for him, since, as the Son, he was connected by the Spirit with the one who now revealed his rule to the people. If he was connected with God through his Spirit, he was linked to the power that perfects all things, with the grace that reconciles, and with the righteousness that executes justice.<sup>164</sup>

The christological centrepiece – that Jesus lived from and for God – is now pneumatologically reflected. For Schlatter, it is "God's Spirit by whom Jesus receives the power to carry out God's will. Jesus is conceived by the Spirit, revealed by the Spirit's descent upon him and empowered by the Spirit to do his work."<sup>165</sup> Because Jesus is equipped with the Spirit of God, he serves God, belongs to him and is sanctified for him.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Scholarship has thus far paid no attention to the place and meaning of the Holy Spirit in Schlatter's christology. See especially Fraas, *Gotteslehre*, 63-83 but also Rieger, *Rechtfertigungslehre*, 307-26.

<sup>163</sup> "Sünde gegen den heiligen Geist," 76.

<sup>164</sup> *History of the Christ*, 85.

<sup>165</sup> *Theology of the Apostles*, 78.

<sup>166</sup> See *Ruf Jesu*, 15-16. The conceptual significance of the agency of the Holy Spirit for Schlatter's christology is substantiated when he articulates it as the "motive and theme" of his christology to show "that here

Even the selfless love in which Jesus dedicates and submits himself to God is mediated by the Holy Spirit. "In his temptation, he proved to be the bearer of the Spirit by distancing himself from evil will by his own decision and by yielding to God with all his trust."<sup>167</sup> Schlatter directly links Jesus' refutation of egoistic Sonship and his subordination to God with the agency of the Holy Spirit. "Jesus can overcome sin as he remains in the Father's good pleasure and thinks, chooses and acts in the Spirit."<sup>168</sup> This means for Jesus to wait for God and receive his actions from him.

Jesus was enabled by God to the deeds that he performed out of his mercy by his own will. It was God's gift, first for himself, and through him for the one who requested it. For this reason he said, regarding the signs, that God's spirit worked them through himself and that they were mediated through his prayer and were God's answer to it.<sup>169</sup>

As the Son, Jesus is dependent upon the Father in the Spirit. "It was when Jesus saw that God's Spirit was in him that he acted."<sup>170</sup> Hence, Schlatter outlines the passivity and humility of Jesus, in which he did not selfishly abuse the gifts of the Father for himself, as "the product of the Spirit."<sup>171</sup>

The mediatory work of the Holy Spirit concerns Jesus' vertical relationship with the Father as well as his horizontal relationship with fellow man. The same pneumatic relatedness by means of which the Son lives from and for the Father enables Jesus to accomplish his work as Christ for mankind.<sup>172</sup> The latter, Schlatter argues, collapses without the Spirit.

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a human life originated from God, was lived in service for God and was sanctified to be God's instrument in order that God's grace might show itself to us unabridged and completed through him" (*Briefe*, 29; see also *Rückblick*, 92; *Kennen wir Jesus?*, 55).

<sup>167</sup> *History of the Christ*, 133.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 185 (with reference to Mt 12:28).

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 83

<sup>171</sup> *Jesu Demut*, 57. A similar view of the work of the Holy Spirit in Jesus can be found in Pannenberg: "Since the whole work of Jesus, aiming as it does at the knowledge and acknowledgment of the Father and the coming of his kingdom, has the glorifying of the Father as its ultimate goal, it is to be viewed as a work of the Spirit in him" (*Systematic Theology*, vol. I, 316-17).

<sup>172</sup> For a similar attempt to articulate the "double relationality" of Jesus Christ in pneumatological terms see e.g. Greshake, *Der dreieine Gott*, 359-62.

The function he [Christ] exercises is giving – for his goal is neither self-portrayal, nor self-actuation [*ein Sich-selbst-ausleben*] on the basis of the special property granted to him, nor enjoyment of his blissful communion with God. In him the royal grace of God enters into mankind, seeking man, forming man from God and for God, and this happens through the Spirit.<sup>173</sup>

Jesus' way to the cross on which his life as the incarnate Son of the eternal Father reaches its dramatic climax, was made possible for him through the work of the Holy Spirit in him. Schlatter makes this point with reference to Heb 9:14. Jesus' "*Opfersinn*" and "*Heilandswille* which urged him to his priestly work," "the power to carry the cross, to shed his blood and to honour God until his last breath" came from the Spirit.

The draught that drew the Son to the Father so that he offered and sacrificed himself to him, [the draught] that made him one with the Father so that he served God's grace as instrument and his covenant as mediator, that is the Spirit, the eternal Spirit, because it is God's Spirit who makes the Son one with the Father in eternal communion.<sup>174</sup>

Thus, Schlatter links the origin, outcome and success of Christ's work with the fact that he lived completely by the Spirit. "However, because Jesus did what he did in the body according to the will of the Spirit and in the power of the Spirit, his history is imperishable, unforgettable – the place at which eternal life originated."<sup>175</sup> The resurrection from the dead reveals the Holy Spirit once more as the quickener and enabler of the man Jesus. "The finale [*Ausgang*] of Jesus takes place through a creative act of God that resurrects him."<sup>176</sup>

Along the lines just sketched out, Schlatter summarises the history of Christ stating "that Jesus was born from the Spirit, was equipped through the Spirit in his baptism for his

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<sup>173</sup> *Dogma*, 346.

<sup>174</sup> *Erläuterungen III*, 282-83; similarly in *Jesu Gottheit*, 34-35. Cf. Schwöbel's words about "the story of Jesus as the story of a life constituted by and conducted in the Spirit which is obedient to God the Father to the death on Calvary and to the resurrection on the third day and which in this way is the coming of God's kingdom for the salvation of his creation. One element of this story is here of special significance. The obedience of Jesus as the Son to the Father is over and over again from his birth to his resurrection described as one that is enabled from the Father by the Spirit and exercised in response to the Father in the Spirit" ("Christology and Trinitarian Thought," 140-41).

<sup>175</sup> "Jesus und wir heutigen Menschen," 213; see also *Theology of the Apostles*, 347-48.

<sup>176</sup> *Dogma*, 332; similarly *ibid.*, 310. For the notion of resurrection as "the creative act by which God gives life" see also *History of the Christ*, 383; "Auferstehung Jesu," 153.

work and was made alive by the Spirit after his cross."<sup>177</sup> Schlatter can also put this in terms of God's creativity: "Therefore, God's creative activity is nowhere as visible as in him. This is true with regard to his beginning in the miracle of Christmas, as well as his finale in the miracle of Easter, and it shows itself no less in his healing deeds."<sup>178</sup> Schlatter is keen to underscore that the creative agency of the Holy Spirit in Jesus never operates at the expense of his humanity.

What did the Spirit create? A child in the womb of the mother. What came about through the transfiguration of Jesus? The one who willingly walked from the presence of God down to the faithless people and completed his way to the cross. What arose through the resurrection? Not the renunciation of humanity, not the recall of the act of Christmas, through which the Word had become flesh, rather its [humanity's] eternalisation.<sup>179</sup>

Corresponding to this is the fact that "Jesus distinguished between his inner life and the Holy Spirit. He looked up to the Spirit as to the strength by which he received the ability to do miracles." The "enthusiastic concept of the spirit," according to which the divine spirit overcomes and suspends human personhood, remained as foreign to Jesus as the "gnostic concept of 'son.'"<sup>180</sup> In the New Testament, Schlatter argues, the "Son of God completely retains the natural manner of human life and is united as a human being not with an inferior God or a divine force – such does not exist for the apostles – but with the Father."<sup>181</sup>

To sum up Schlatter's understanding of this: Jesus – in the otherness of a human creature – relates to God as his Father in the Holy Spirit. Jesus' Sonship and his being-moved by the Holy Spirit are indissolubly connected in Schlatter's christology. The uniqueness of Jesus' Sonship of God is grounded "in the completeness with which he possessed the

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<sup>177</sup> *Ruf Jesu*, 327.

<sup>178</sup> "Wunder der Bibel," 74; cf. *Ruf Jesu*, 329; *Theology of the Apostles*, 369. Similarly Gunton who regards Christ's incarnation and resurrection as "paradigm cases of the way of the Spirit with all created reality" ("God the Holy Spirit," 118).

<sup>179</sup> *Sprechstunde*, 26.

<sup>180</sup> *History of the Christ*, 133.

<sup>181</sup> *Theology of the Apostles*, 366. Cf. Gunton in *Christ and Creation*, 90: "The Holy Spirit represents God's otherness to Jesus: his allowing and enabling him to be himself, free and truly human. He is personally alongside Jesus, present to him as another."

Spirit's power that had conceived him body and soul. Since he lived completely by the Spirit, he stood alongside the Father and the Spirit: on the same level as God rather than man."<sup>182</sup> Schlatter brings it to the point when he states that "the principle . . . on which the Sonship of the God-man rests" is "the Spirit of God."<sup>183</sup> Thus, Schlatter's christology must be seen as a pneumatological, and hence, trinitarian christology which, indeed, shows a remarkable affinity to those christological conceptions in which due weight is given to the agency of the Holy Spirit.<sup>184</sup>

#### **D. Aspects of a trinitarian christology in Schlatter**

Schlatter's references to Christ as the rule of thought according to which we have to relate humanity and deity prompted us to investigate basic features of his christology. In our view, Schlatter relates Christ's deity and humanity without flattening out the distinctness of each. Shaped by his awareness of the docetic tendencies lurking in different christological traditions, Schlatter develops an incarnational christology which gives due weight to the full humanity of Jesus. Schlatter's conception rests upon a trinitarian hermeneutic, the key aspects of which we are to pinpoint now.

<sup>182</sup> *Theology of the Apostles*, 78; cf. *History of the Christ*, 58, 85.

<sup>183</sup> \**Wesen und Quellen*, 171.

<sup>184</sup> For the Holy Spirit "as the medium of the communion of Jesus with the Father" see e.g. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. I, 266-68: "The fellowship of Jesus as Son with God as Father can obviously be stated only if there is reference to a third as well, the Holy Spirit (267).

The parallels between Schlatter's christology and that of Gunton would provide sufficient material for a promising comparative study. Suffice it here to say that Gunton, learning from theologians such as John Owen and Edward Irving, conceives of the Holy Spirit as "'the author'" of Jesus' "'bodily life' . . . as God's free and life-giving activity in and towards the world as he maintains and empowers the human activity of the incarnate Son. The Spirit is thus revealed ('manifested') in 'subduing, restraining, conquering, the evil propensities of the fallen manhood, and making it an apt organ for expressing the will of the Father; a fit and holy substance to enter into communion with the untempted and untemptable Godhead'. God the Spirit opens, frees, the humanity of the Son so that it may be the vehicle of the Father's will in the world ('God the Holy Spirit,' 115-16, partly quoting Irving). The main references for Gunton's pneumatologically driven christology are *Yesterday and Today*, 220-26; *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 69-71, 99-100 *Christ and Creation*, 50-68; "God the Holy Spirit," 114-19; "Christology: Two Dogmas Revisited," 161-68. For Owen and Irving see McFarlane, *Christ and the Spirit*, 125-83, especially the listing of the Spirit's acting upon Christ on pp. 160-61; Spence, "Christ's Humanity and Ours: John Owen," especially pp. 75-76, 83-88, 95-97.

i. The concept of *enhypostasia*

Schlatter clearly affirms the classical doctrine that the humanity of Christ subsists *enhypostatically* in the eternal Logos, in the person of the Son.<sup>185</sup> The former is ontologically dependent upon the latter. However, the incarnation of the Son is the result of the interrelation and interaction of Father, Son and Holy Spirit and, as such, an expression of the deity of the Son. As we have seen, the notion of the Son's otherness from the Father and the mediation of the Holy Spirit play a crucial role in this context. Christ's deity, that is, the being of the eternal Son in his relation to the Father in the Holy Spirit, and his humanity are not located on the same ontological level, for which reason Schlatter is able to affirm the incarnation as the creation of a fully human being. The distinct character of Schlatter's christology lies for us in his application of the aforementioned concepts to the entire life of the incarnate Son. The idea of *enhypostasia* means for Schlatter precisely *not* that the incarnate Son relates himself to the Logos in him but to the Father above him. Whereas the divine Word is ascribed the active role in the incarnation, it is the agency of the Holy Spirit which comes into focus when the now incarnate Son lives his life in the Father.<sup>186</sup> In his discussion of a possible egoistic sonship, Schlatter has forcefully argued that a life of Jesus from and for himself would result in a loss of divine Sonship, whereas the life from and for the Father in the Holy Spirit means the actualisation of Jesus' Sonship of God.<sup>187</sup> Through this, as we may call it, trinitarian understanding of *enhypostasia* Schlatter is able to relate Jesus'

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<sup>185</sup> For the origin of this doctrine see e.g. Pannenberg, *Jesus – God and Man*, 385-87; Stickelbroeck, *Christologie im Horizont der Seinsfrage*, 183-203.

<sup>186</sup> In a certain way Schlatter's thoughts run parallel to John Owen's conviction "that the eternal Son of God assumed human nature into personal union with himself, but . . . that all direct divine activity on that assumed human nature was that of the Holy Spirit" (Spence, "Christ's Humanity and Ours," 75-76).

<sup>187</sup> A similar modification of the notion of *enhypostasis* is undertaken by Pannenberg: "He did not live in dependence upon the Son; this obvious understanding of the enhypostasis of Jesus in the Logos does not do justice to the historical features of the life of Jesus. Rather, he lived in dependence on the Father, but precisely in so doing showed himself to be one with the Son" (*Jesus – God and Man*, 388; see also *Systematic Theology*, vol. II, 389).



divine Sonship and his humanity without making them compete against each other on the same level.

ii. Communion in distinctness

Schlatter's grasp of the communion of love between Father and Son is of fundamental importance for his understanding of Christ's humanity and lowliness as expression of his divine Sonship. The love from the Father to the Son and vice versa is conceived of as creative and giving love. The divine love constitutes the unity between the two relata but also – and this is the decisive point – their *true otherness*. This relationship is mediated by the Holy Spirit, the "principle" of Jesus' Sonship. Through this pneumatological concept of the communion of love between Father and Son, Schlatter gains the conceptual space for the otherness and particularity of the Son.<sup>188</sup> On these grounds, the humanity of Jesus can be conceived of as corresponding to the otherness of the Son from the Father.

For Jesus . . . there was even room in his filial relationship for a genuine, real human life, since he did not view God merely with regard to his power but foremost of all with regard to his grace. He could be a man in such a way as to be with the Father; he could be the Son in such a way as to be able to be a man. For the decisive point at which communion with God occurred lay for him in the personal act of life. Being known by the Father meant to stand in his love; knowing the Father meant to love him. But he also had the complete love of God characteristic of the Son of God in his human course of life and on the way to the cross.<sup>189</sup>

We saw in this connection that Schlatter works with a concept of the *monarchia* of the Father according to which "the Son has his origin from the Father."<sup>190</sup> Jesus' self-humbling and subordination to God do not undermine his deity but are expressive of the relationship in which the Son corresponds to the Fatherhood of the Father.

<sup>188</sup> Gunton proceeds along similar lines when he argues "that it is in the incarnation and particularly in relation to the humanity of Christ in general that we discern the activity of the Spirit as the life-giving power of God in and towards his creation. It is in that way that the Spirit particularises: brings it about by his action in relation to the creation that this Jewish humanity is able to be distinctively what it is as the bearer of God's salvation" ("God the Holy Spirit," 114). "The Spirit is on such an account not so much an endowment as the one sent from the Father who in personal divine action enables the incarnate Son to be himself" (ibid., 116).

<sup>189</sup> *History of the Christ*, 223.

<sup>190</sup> *Furcht vor dem Denken*, 54.

For Jesus does not present himself as God's manifestation in such a way that only in him, only in this human 'I' the God-power, the God-life, the God-truth exists. The same exists in him as well as above him, and this, of course, in the absolute perfection of a person. Jesus expressed this distinction in God through the terms 'Father' and 'Son.' In this he puts himself in the fullest dependence upon the Father – for the Son is everything he is and has from the Father. At the same time, it is precisely the idea of Sonship which expresses equality with the Father: he distinguishes himself from God in no other way as the Son from the Father.<sup>191</sup>

### iii. Jesus and God – essential and personal communion

We are now able to see that Schlatter's critique of the orthodox doctrine of the two natures of Christ concerns not what the latter says but rather what it does not say.<sup>192</sup> Schlatter clearly affirms the ontic-metaphysical character of the christological statements of the Ancient Church:

God's life does not merely consist in individual acts or temporally limited effects. He is. The same is true of Jesus. What he is gives shape to what he does. He does not acquire sonship and rule through his individual acts but possesses them on account of what he is in his continual relationship with God.<sup>193</sup>

However, christological reflection about the identity of Jesus Christ must not, as Schlatter emphasises, stand still at this point. For the idea of the possession of a divine and a human nature can all too easily turn into the image of a composition of two substances so that the being of the incarnate Son is presented as something static and self-sufficient. "Jesus' communion with God is then conceived of merely as nature, not as Spirit and will, therefore as *gebundenes Einerlei*, not as dynamic vivacity."<sup>194</sup> Schlatter was fully aware of the

<sup>191</sup> \**Wesen und Quellen*, 157; similarly in *Dogma*, 354-55. Cf. Gunton on Irving's employment of the concept of *monarchia* in this context: "[T]he Son need not be conceived as being divine *in the same way* as the Father. He is divine, we might say, according to his own hypostasis, a hypostasis having its shape by virtue of its relations to Father and Spirit, but having the distinctive shape manifested by self-giving obedience, *kenosis*. That is the reason why the humanity of Jesus is not foreign to but an expression of the deity of the Son . . ." ("Christology: Two Dogmas Revisited," 167).

<sup>192</sup> See what we have outlined above, pp. 175ff.

<sup>193</sup> *Theology of the Apostles*, 132; cf. the citations above, p. 179. Brodbeck's statements about Schlatter's christology must be rejected as simply misleading when she writes that Schlatter critiques the "*dogmatische Vergöttlichung Jesu*" and turns against a "*Hoheitschristologie, die Jesus zur Gottheit erhob, statt in ihm eine Offenbarung Gottes zu sehen*" (*Hunger nach Gerechtigkeit*, 184). The same applies to Fraas when he speaks of Schlatter's "*Skepsis gegen eine ontologische Interpretation der Zweinaturenlehre*" (*Gotteslehre*, 73).

<sup>194</sup> *Jesu Gottheit*, 94.

fact that a christology which loses the creative and giving communion of love between Jesus the Son and God the Father, is increasingly unable to uphold Christ's deity as well as his humanity. For Jesus' self "is neither sunk nor imprisoned in his 'I'-entity, but is that self which wants to do the work of God and wants to destroy the works of the devil. It lives and preserves itself in that it receives nothing from the devil but everything from God."<sup>195</sup> In other words, a christology which claims that, in this man Jesus, we are dealing with the Son of God who fully participates in the deity of the Father, can – and this is Schlatter's decisive insight – only substantiate this claim by referring to the biblical account of the relationship between the incarnate Son and the Father in the Spirit.

On these grounds, Schlatter explicates the being of the incarnate Son in terms of dynamic being, thereby consistently linking the substantial character and the relational and actional aspect of being. As Schlatter puts it with regard to John's christology, "being and act are here not brought into a mutual tension; rather, essence generates act, revealing and upholding itself through it."<sup>196</sup> An ontological understanding of Jesus' Sonship must not render his life and work indifferent as something external or supplementary to his filial being.<sup>197</sup> Rather, the being of the incarnate Son actualises itself in and through his interaction and interrelation with God and man.

Jesus' 'nature' would not exist apart from these acts; his works do not merely reveal his nature but render it effective, so that it has its existence and its reality by them and in them. From Jesus' 'I am' result his knowing and loving, his bearing of witness, and his ministry. His obedience is not merely a manifestation of his Sonship but [his Sonship] exists and is preserved by it [Jesus' obedience].<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> *Jesu Gottheit*, 93.

<sup>196</sup> *History of the Christ*, 130.

<sup>197</sup> Schlatter's awareness of the problematic soteriological implications of such a concept of Christ's humanity cannot further be explored here. His critique of the notion of "the passive humanity of Jesus" in *Di-enst*, 79-82 is crucial in this connection.

<sup>198</sup> *Theology of the Apostles*, 133. We must include the brackets in the citation here because Köstenberger's translation is imprecise in suggesting that Jesus' Sonship determines his obedience. Yet, this would only repeat the first half of Schlatter's statement. What Schlatter articulates in the second half of the sentence is that Jesus' obedience is also constitutive of his Sonship (see *Theologie der Apostel*, 162).

This means that the unity of the incarnate Son with God his Father is established via the otherness of the Son who makes his will and work one with the Father. Schlatter articulates this in stating that "Jesus possesses his Sonship through that which he does" and "by means of having his goal above himself in the Father and, therefore, in front of himself in us so that he lives, dies and is glorified for the Father and, therefore, for us."<sup>199</sup> Therefore, Schlatter outlines the communion between the incarnate Son and God in terms of essential unity (*Wesenseinheit*) and personal unity of will and action, both of which stand in mutual relation to each other.<sup>200</sup> "How would it be possible to believe in the unity of essence (*Homousie*) of both [Father and Son] if the unity of will between them was doubtful? In the unanimity of the wills, the unity of essence has its manifestation." In a roundabout way, Schlatter speaks of a relationship with God "which grants him the unity of essence with God and thus creates the God-man."<sup>201</sup> As far as we can see, Schlatter appropriates the unity of essence in a special way to the action of the Word, and the personal unity of will and action to the agency of the Holy Spirit.<sup>202</sup>

In all of this Schlatter is able to do justice to the biblical vivacity and particularity of the person of Jesus in his relationship with God. Schlatter's notion that the distinctness of Jesus from God is "the precondition as well as the result of his communion [*Verbundenheit*] with him" must be seen in the light of the material just outlined.<sup>203</sup> The ramification for Schlatter's understanding of the God-manhood of Christ is that the humanity is not only

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<sup>199</sup> *Theologie des NT I*, 440; *Ethik*, 63 (in above order); similarly and with direct reference to Jesus' office of Christ in *History of the Christ*, 131-32.

<sup>200</sup> See e.g. "Christologie der Bergpredigt," 328; *History of the Christ*, 30; *Jesu Gottheit*, 21, 28, 30-31, 42, 47, 51-52.

<sup>201</sup> *Jesu Gottheit*, 8-9, 12. See also Rieger's remarks in *Rechtfertigungslehre*, 322, 325-26.

<sup>202</sup> That this appropriation does not operate at the expense of the actional unity of the Word and the Spirit has been outlined above, pp. 152ff.

<sup>203</sup> *Jesu Demut*, 80; similarly *ibid.* 84.

assumed by the Word but actively participates in the filial communion by means of which Jesus shares in the divine being of the Father.

[T]he humanity in Christ is that which the Godhead wills, and the human 'I' in its natural and historical limitedness is set through the Godhead. The Spirit generates Jesus, including his corporeality, and the Word itself determines the natural being of man. God opens himself to man and takes him into complete communion with himself. Therefore the God-manhood is, even with respect to its human side, grounded in the act of will. The God-given human will turns upwards and has its goal as well as its origin in God. In the affirmation of the Father, the Son lives as Son by means of which the union of deity and humanity remains real in him.<sup>204</sup>

In this, as Schlatter underscores, no development of Jesus' Sonship of God is stated according to which deity and humanity gradually grow together. "[T]he union of God with man in Christ must not be conceived of in terms of becoming but rather as that which founded the becoming and growing of Jesus' humanity" so that it "becomes increasingly suitable to be the organ and revelation of the deity."<sup>205</sup>

Now Schlatter's notion of the God-manhood of Christ as "the miracle of the pneumatic action of God on its highest level" unfolds its full meaning. Since the Holy Spirit is the enabler of Christ's humanity, the unity of will and action is a "pneumatological union." Hence Schlatter's conclusion: "The miracle in Jesus' being seems to me a miracle of union, of volitional and, therefore, essential union, not of a transubstantiation of nature."<sup>206</sup>

To draw an intermediate conclusion: Schlatter's christology has presented itself to us as a trinitarian christology which not only gives rise to, but is also determined by, a doctrine of the triune being of God. We are therefore well advised to explore Schlatter's understanding of the Trinity before we – in the concluding chapter of this study – expose the christological and, on that basis, trinitarian grounds of Schlatter's theology of divine action.

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<sup>204</sup> *Dogma*, 340.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*; cf. Rieger, *Rechtfertigungslehre*, 326.

<sup>206</sup> "Bekenntnis zur Gottheit Jesu," 44, 48, 46-47 (in above order).

## 2. Schlatter's doctrine of the Trinity

The indissoluble connection between knowledge of God's being and knowledge of God's works, as we have outlined it in the opening paragraph of this study, is directly reflected in Schlatter's doctrine of the Trinity: the ground for our knowledge of God's triune being is God's triune economy.

When we distinguish between the Trinity of God's revelation and of God's being, we must not speak about the revealed Trinity as an inferior kind of Trinity; for it exists for us only in so far as it is revealed in God's action. Rather, we must completely affirm the threefold way of God's acting and find in it that which is God's being. The description of God's being comes about in no other way than through collecting what reveals itself to us in the plurality of the event. It [the description of God's being] shows us nothing beyond the historical act, but elucidates to us only what the act, in its concrete form [*Gestalt*], places before us. For in the act the being makes itself visible, and the latter is not being without the act.<sup>207</sup>

The strengths and the limitations of Schlatter's "empirical theology" come clearly to the surface in Schlatter's outline of God's triune being. Schlatter, as we seek to show in the following, provides us with a trinitarian theology in which – because of its consistent reference to God's actions and works *ad extra* – the doctrine of the Trinity is never disconnected from the rest of the other dogmatic loci. However, his reflections with regard to the content break off too early in order to bring about a fully elaborate doctrine of God's triune being. A quick look at Schlatter's dogmatics shows that "Schlatter's comments on the doctrine of the Trinity are remarkably terse: of the over 600 pages of his dogmatics he dedicates only three pages to this doctrinal piece."<sup>208</sup> Schlatter himself was fully aware of the limitations of his dogmatics in this respect. Looking back upon his work he explains that his "thoughts often ended where the theological task strictly speaking just begins." He hopes that his successors will develop "more substantial formulae for the Trinity, for the deity of the Son

<sup>207</sup> *Dogma*, 354. Although Schlatter does not use the terms "economic" and "immanent" we are reminded here of Karl Rahner's axiom: "The 'economic' Trinity is the 'immanent' Trinity and the 'immanent' Trinity is the 'economic' Trinity" (*The Trinity*, 22). In how far this statement must be safeguarded against misinterpretation when we apply it to Schlatter's approach will be outlined in due course.

<sup>208</sup> Neuer, *Zusammenhang*, 118. These three pages are found in *Dogma*, 354-56. Additional remarks on the Trinity occur *ibid.*, 24, 34-36, 148, 179-80, 198, 352-53, 479, 559.

...<sup>209</sup> On account of this, a critique which confronted Schlatter's approach simply with those of contemporary trinitarian theology, would not do justice to him. Having critically remarked on this, we now attempt to outline what Schlatter has to say about God's triune being on the basis of God's actions and works.

#### A. *Vestigia trinitatis* – the relational pattern of unity and plurality

The theological method to deduce knowledge of God's triune being from God's works stands in line with the theological tradition of the *vestigia trinitatis*.<sup>210</sup> Schlatter's propositions about God's triune being take the form of analogical predications based upon his perception of unity and plurality as ontological constituents of the creaturely reality of this world. The creaturely analogues are man, nature and human community. Space does not allow us to present Schlatter's treatment of the metaphysical categories of unity and plurality.<sup>211</sup> For us it is sufficient to note that, according to Schlatter, both categories are indissolubly and mutually related. "We do know unity only in the way that it has plurality with itself, and plurality only in the way that it possesses unity."<sup>212</sup> Thus, Schlatter continuously underlines that the one category must not be denied for the sake of the other. If the unity is removed, the plurality of reality collapses into pluralism. If the plurality is removed, the unity of reality disintegrates into uniformity.<sup>213</sup>

<sup>209</sup> *Rückblick*, 238. See also Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter: ein Leben*, 491-92.

<sup>210</sup> Barth locates the origins of this tradition in Augustine. The expression *vestigium trinitatis* "seems to come from Augustine and it means an analogue of the Trinity, of the trinitarian God of Christian revelation, in some creaturely reality distinct from him . . ." (*Church Dogmatics* 1. 1, 334). We owe this reference to A. Torrance, *Persons in Communion*, 125. Schlatter himself does not use the phrase *vestigium trinitatis* but expressions such as "a kind of triunity," "trinitarian order," "witness," "manifestation," and "image."

<sup>211</sup> Walldorf has done this in an exemplary way in *Realistische Philosophie*, 151-62.

<sup>212</sup> *Metaphysik*, 26.

<sup>213</sup> See e.g. *ibid.*, 31-32; *Dogma*, 25; *Gründe*, 52-54; *Philosophische Arbeit*, 239-40, 279-81. The parallels between Schlatter and Baader in this respect have been outlined by Kindt (*Gedanke der Einheit*, 63-64) and Walldorf (*Realistische Philosophie*, 151).

i. The anthropological analogy

The following quote about the unity of man's self-consciousness brings us directly to the heart of Schlatter's understanding of the human person as *vestigium trinitatis*:

We assign all our uncounted presentations to the same 'I'. We possess the marvellous faculties of memory and foresight, through which we relate the multiplicity of our acts, which stretches out in time, to the same 'I,' to 'us.' Through the constant presence of the concept of unity in our inner life the number emerges. One 'I' is not two or three, but one, not a half or any other fraction, but a whole. Our unity, however, is only given to us together with a fullness that is uncountable for us, not as exclusion but as embracing of an endlessly rich manifoldness. An endless row of emotions, presentations and desires is set into the one 'I'. In that the fullness of the event is penetrated by unity, we are given wholeness [*Ganzheit*], completeness [*Vollständigkeit*] and totality [*Totalität*]. The 'whole' comes about through the unity that embraces the plurality. We can neither deny the certainty of our unity nor the perception of the manifoldness that exists in us without destroying our personal life.<sup>214</sup>

When Schlatter applies the same complementarity to the personal acts of knowing and willing, reference to trinitarian traces becomes explicit.

[O]ur inner acting and forming is known by us as a unity. Already the process of consciousness shows this since we, the ones who see, distinguish our picture from – but at the same time unite it with – us. Because we are in possession of our picture, there constantly arises in us a kind of triunity; to the person who knows there comes the one who is known, yet not in such a way that the two stand over against one another but there appears at once the third: the person who knows himself in the one known."<sup>215</sup>

In direct analogy to the "kind of triunity" appearing in the act of thinking, Schlatter expounds the act of volition. "The trinitarian order of our life is visible here as well; we have a direct volition, an elective volition and the union of the two – the volition elected by us, which has within it the power to act."<sup>216</sup> It is therefore not surprising that Schlatter in his section on the Trinity refers to "the unity which our self-consciousness shows us" and to the fact "that our inner acts are united to trinitarian formations [*Bildungen*] so that we describe the life acts [*Lebensakte*], as far as they possess unimpaired normality, by employ-

<sup>214</sup> *Dogma*, 24-25; cf. *Metaphysik*, 31-32; "Schätzung der Individualität," 122.

<sup>215</sup> *Dogma*, 24.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, 148. Barth rightly notices the close connection between F. W. J. Schelling and Schlatter here: "We need only refer to the relation which results from this [Schlatter's concept] to Schelling's triad of subject, object and subject-object . . ." (*Church Dogmatics* 1. 1, 338). Schlatter himself affirms the connection with Schelling in his *Philosophische Arbeit*, 188-89. For a similar link between Schlatter and Baader see Kindt's synopsis in *Gedanke der Einheit*, 72-74.



ing trinitarian formulae."<sup>217</sup> Schlatter's anthropological analogies stand, as Barth remarks, within the Augustinian tradition and its idea of the trinitarian structure of human consciousness.<sup>218</sup>

## ii. The natural analogy

Just as in the personal life, the sphere of the natural life of creation reveals, according to Schlatter, the same relational pattern of unity and plurality. Unlike our personal life, "nature stands before us as a plurality. The unity, which it also possesses, stands above the many and keeps them (as their law) together in that it makes the many effect each other." For Schlatter, "the glory of nature does not consist in infinity alone but in the controlled, ordered, united infinity. It [nature] does not disintegrate into a repulsive plurality . . . ." Schlatter exemplifies the interplay of unity and plurality in nature on the basis of the human body. "We ascribe to ourselves a single body, not many, yet in this body we see an uncountable number of independent particles."<sup>219</sup> The crucial point to see here is that unity and plurality mutually constitute each other. Discussing the idea of type, Schlatter states:

The particular [*die Besonderung*] does not adhere to the typical [*Typik*] as the latter's damage – just as little does the type corrupt the individual life of the individualised entity [*Gebilde*]. The body consists of organs which possess their individual life, and the type which makes the body a whole gives peculiarity to the part.<sup>220</sup>

Schlatter outlines the relational pattern of unity and plurality as a manifestation of the triune God, although he does not use the terms "Trinity" or "trinitarian" explicitly in this connection. For what is true of nature in general applies to unity and plurality in particular.

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<sup>217</sup> *Dogma*, 354.

<sup>218</sup> See Barth, *Church Dogmatics* 1. 1, 337-38. For a brief outline of the Augustinian tradition see also Greshake, *Der dreieine Gott*, 95-100; Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 31-57.

<sup>219</sup> All quotations are taken from *Dogma*, 38-41.

<sup>220</sup> *Dogma*, 53.

Both are created by God, "the generator of the unity that embraces the fullness."<sup>221</sup> Schlatter explains: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.' Through this the world became a unity for it has *one* worker [*Wirker*]. It did not become a place of disorder or a playground for ghosts for it cannot disconnect itself from the perfect will who gave existence to it."<sup>222</sup> Yet, as Schlatter puts it, "[o]ur Creator is, at the same time, the Creator of infinities."<sup>223</sup> In its interplay with unity, "the unlimitedness of nature becomes a witness to the divine glory because it unveils to us the inexhaustibility of the divine creating."<sup>224</sup> Schlatter even goes a step further and ascribes unity and plurality to God's being.

It [unity] cannot be conceived of as the nullification of all particularity [*Bestimmtheit*], as the exclusion of all plurality. Nature manifests God as *myrias virium*, as the originator of the material as well as the spiritual forces, and each of these spheres has in turn a manifoldness of particularities in itself. . . . God is, however, not only the originator of plurality but also of unity in the cosmos. Here his simplicity manifests itself as well in so far as all plurality in him is comprehended in the undivided and unsplit unity of his being. It is here that the idea of personhood originates.<sup>225</sup>

### iii. The social analogy

Schlatter's extensive reflections on human sociality constitute the most significant analogy on which he grounds his knowledge of, and speech about, God's triune being. It is therefore appropriate that we – in all due pithiness – pay closer attention to Schlatter's ideas in this respect.

#### a) The normal community and its human impossibility

The issue of unity and plurality is, at the sociological level, reflected in the question about the individual person in relation to community. In Schlatter, as we have outlined

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<sup>221</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>222</sup> "Die von der Bibel uns bereitete Not," 7.

<sup>223</sup> *Dogma*, 40.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>225</sup> \**Wesen und Quellen*, 213-14.

above, individuality and sociality are conceived of as simultaneously original. He locates the *imago Dei* of man in the interrelation and interaction in which human persons enable one another to be.<sup>226</sup> Important for our purposes here is Schlatter's notion of the "normal community" or "free community."<sup>227</sup> These phrases refer to a community "which brings forth, rather than hinders, the individualisation of the single persons and makes them, with their whole particular property, fruitful for the community."<sup>228</sup> It is Schlatter's biblical realism which, however, prevents him from idealistic conceptions of human communities and makes him aware of the destructive lapse of the reciprocity of individuality and sociality into the mutuality of despotism and anarchy.<sup>229</sup> Schlatter works out that "the quarrel between the whole and its parts"<sup>230</sup> is due to human sinfulness and can only be overcome through love:

For the distortions of our communities into either anarchy or despotism come about through the selfish will to power. If we, however, obey the rule of love, then the individual arises who lives for the other, and the community which serves its members. *The question for the Creator of the normal community is thus identical with the question for the one who creates the love in us*" (emphasis A. L.).<sup>231</sup>

The terminology of creation indicates that Schlatter understands the realisation of the community of love as being outside the reach of human possibilities.

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<sup>226</sup> See above, pp. 27, 37f. According to Schlatter's critical assessment of different philosophical approaches (see *Philosophische Arbeit*, 45-46, 49, 82-83, 149, 166, 171-72, 183, 207-08, 276-77), Baader is one of the great exceptions in ascribing ontological status to community, thereby mutually relating individuality and sociality: "Community [*Sozietät*] does not arise only after the individuals but with them, and the same become through community as well as community through them. It is absurd to understand man as God's creature, society, however, not as God's creation but as an artificial product of man. Baader resolutely dispenses with ideas about the origin of the state as they are held by Hobbes or Rousseau" (p.193). Similarly Gunton's critique in *The One, the Three and the Many*, 219-23.

<sup>227</sup> The terms occur e.g. in *Dogma*, 344, *Gründe*, 60, "Letzte Bitte Jesu," 319-22.

<sup>228</sup> *Gründe*, 60. Similarly in *Dogma*, 64; *Ethik*, 61-62, 112-14, 140.

<sup>229</sup> We must leave a closer examination of Schlatter's analysis to other readers of his work. Crucial texts are e.g. *Dogma*, 65-69, 71-72, 74-77; *Gründe*, 59-60; *Ethik*, 23, 111-14, 139-40, 151-52, 184-86; *Metaphysik*, 45-46; *Paulus der Bote*, 344-53; *Die neue deutsche Art*, 17-22; *Philosophische Arbeit*, 22-23, 193-96. Remarkable is Schlatter's clear perception of the "*Gleichheitsideal*" as "the strongly effective poison that endangers all our communities" (*Ethik*, 113).

<sup>230</sup> *Ethik*, 63.

<sup>231</sup> *Gründe*, 60; similarly in *Ethik*, 252; *Dogma*, 64, 78.

b) The community of love – creative action and revelation of the Trinity

Schlatter answers the question for the creator of the normal community in his important essay on Jn 17:20-25. The free community "was that which the dying Christ pleaded for, for himself, from the Father."<sup>232</sup> The prayer unveils the goal and purpose of Christ's life and work, namely the establishment of the church – the community of faith. The climax of Jesus' prayer is that he asks the Father for the unity of those people who believe in him.

'I pray for them that all of them are one.' In making the unity of the believers his plea, Jesus expressed that he expected the same from a divine activity . . . The liberating community can only come about in such a way that God creates it as an effect of grace. Thus those considerations which regarded Jesus' goal as impossible, are given their relative right. Indeed, 'with man it is impossible.' However, Jesus' eye embraced not only that which was given to man through creation or through the revelation mediated by earlier history. The will with which Jesus forms his goal has its ground in the certainty that completely determined him, 'that what is impossible with man is possible with God.'<sup>233</sup>

The free community of love has its basis in the communion of love between the incarnate Son and the Father. Schlatter's articulation of this *analogia relationis* or *communio* is so clear and powerful that we quote him at length:

There exists a community in which that which he [Jesus] pleads for concerning the believers, is already realised, which already makes visible what God's work will prepare for them. 'That they may be one just as you, Father, are in me and I am in you.' His communion with the Father is complete in its content and scope, for it comprises his whole life. Its result was neither his impoverishment, nor his emptying, nor the deprivation of his rights. Rather, it has lifted him up to the Father and placed him into the Father so that he lives in the Father as the Father lives in him.

In Jesus' communion with the Father there existed, therefore, a community that did not grow out of the drive of a natural desire. No natural coercion compelled the Father to prepare for himself the Son. Likewise, it is not the emptiness of privation that makes his [the Son's] love desirable to him [the Father], and it is not through his own impotence that is he in need of the Son's service. Just as little is it a law that creates community here, for above God there stands no further duty that binds him. Here community flows out of the fullness of life as the revelation of the will that wants to give because it is love. Therefore, also the Sonship of Jesus does not remain the property given to him alone, but is given to him in order that he may grant power to many to become God's children. And for this reason he, as the dying one, has the will now to plea for them for that unity which has its ground and rule in his own community with the Father.<sup>234</sup>

The church as the community of faith and love is the work of Christ as well as that of the Holy Spirit. "Through the Spirit faith comes into existence, it is the implantation of the

<sup>232</sup> "Letzte Bitte Jesu," 322. The translation of the German original is difficult. ". . . sie war das, was sich der Christus sterbend vom Vater erbeten hat."

<sup>233</sup> "Letzte Bitte Jesu," 327-28.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid., 328-29.

divine Word into the 'I', so that it [the Word] is the force that moves us; likewise, love for God, that is, a will turned toward God that achieves liberation from selfish motives." The Holy Spirit makes human persons sons and daughters of God. This imparting of divine sonship is "our conformation to the Christ so that to the one Son of God the many children of God are joined." Hence, the church is the community of love in which

the individual life of the single person is secured in the same way as the community. Because the inner life of the person is the place where the Spirit creates his work, each one receives an own movement for himself through God. The Spirit is consequently the giver of freedom. In finding in Christ the Lord under whose authority we are, we receive independence through our dependence on him because the indwelling of the Spirit in us gains for us a property given to us by God. In this way, however, the grounding and securing of the individual life does not generate a danger for the community but establishes the complete unity between us. For the Spirit is the same to all of us and is not gained by the individual person but received. Consequently, our history is no longer determined by the egoistic will of man; rather, the divine gift and the unity of what is given to us creates the unity of the church so that both aspects are simultaneously realised here: the freedom through the individual ground of the person in God and the unity through the unity of the ground that carries and forms everybody.<sup>235</sup>

What follows from this is that Schlatter's concept of the *imago Dei* culminates – as was already suggested earlier – in his ecclesiology: "God's glory, God's grace can only appear in us in that it brings us together. If we remain in lonely forlornness, we can not be God's witnesses, can not be a demonstration of Jesus' government. We carry the image of the one who created the church [*Gemeinde*] by being in the church."<sup>236</sup>

On these grounds, the analogy between Christ and the church concerns not only the relational pattern of communion in otherness but also the mode of action by means of which the communion of the respective analogues is established. We might speak of an *analogia operationis* in this respect, indeed, of an analogy of love, and because the operation of the divine love is, at the same, time the operation of the Holy Spirit, we might call it an analogy of the Holy Spirit. As Schlatter himself puts it:

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<sup>235</sup> *Dogma*, 344; similarly in *Die neue deutsche Art*, 17-18. See also *Glaube*, XVII-XVIII: "The formula 'unity in distinctness' has a real ground [*Realgrund*]. It rests on the fact that the one God efficaciously indwells a plurality of persons each of which has – and is supposed to have – its own life." For the church as the community of love see further *Dogma*, 220-22; *Ethik*, 113; *Theology of the Apostles*, 397.

<sup>236</sup> *Ethik*, 176; cf. above, pp. 37f.

The church [*Gemeinde*] experiences communion with Christ [*Christusverband*] as an inner acting of the Holy Spirit, that means as an essential appropriation of the person to God in Christ so that a divine potency enters into the human, personal life as a new real-principle [*Realprinzip*] . . . Thus Christ forms the church into his own image; to the archetypal Son of God comes a multiplicity of sons of God whose sonship rests on the same principle as the archetypal Sonship of the God-man, namely on God's Spirit.<sup>237</sup>

In Schlatter, the church as the community of faith and love is that "which the Christ and the Spirit create in a sinful world."<sup>238</sup> It is "the word about the grace of Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit through which we are one church."<sup>239</sup> Precisely as the work of the Trinity the church is enabled to bring forth true communion through the individuality of its members, and true individuality through the communion between its members. In this way it images the communion of the incarnate Son with God the Father in the Holy Spirit, indeed, receives the likeness of the triune God in his eternal love.

Thus, we remain in line with the Creator of the free community, Jesus, who possesses his Sonship of God through the fact that he has his goal above himself in the Father and, therefore, in front of himself in us so that he lives, dies and is glorified for the Father and, therefore, for us. Likewise, we remain in accordance with what we reach as the final glance into God's being, the glance at the triune one, which gives us an inkling of the eternal love of God.<sup>240</sup>

#### iv. Concluding observations on the different analogies

Given the convergence of Schlatter's approach with traditional concepts of *vestigia trinitatis*, the frivolous playing with the numbers "one" and "three" – which repeatedly occurred in Western tradition – is not something in which Schlatter participates.<sup>241</sup> For the analogical attribution – the interplay of unity and plurality – is independent of the number

<sup>237</sup> \**Wesen und Quellen*, 171.

<sup>238</sup> *Dogma*, 385.

<sup>239</sup> *Die neue deutsche Art*, 22.

<sup>240</sup> *Ethik*, 63.

<sup>241</sup> Concerning this play, A. Torrance, in his examination of Barth's critique of the notion of *vestigia Dei* (for Barth see his *Church Dogmatics* 1. 1, 333–47), discerns the danger that "the controlling determinant too easily becomes *the number three*" (*Persons in Communion*, 203).

of the respective relates. Hence, Schlatter does not straightforwardly derive the triunity of God's being from any triadic pattern of creaturely relationality.<sup>242</sup> Rather, in analogy to the actuality of creation, he attributes unity and plurality (distinctness) to the being of God.

Because God, who makes us unities, is greater than we are, we have to think of the unity in him as perfect as it is possible for us. However, not perfection but nothingness comes about, if fullness is expelled from this unity. Therefore, the affirmation of God's unity includes the idea of self-differentiation, of the inner going-out [*Ausgang*] and going-in [*Eingang*] in full self-knowledge and self-affirmation. Therefore, the ground plan [*Grundriß*] of the notion of the Trinity is intrinsic to every God-consciousness that comprehends God as the one and the living because he gives unity and life.<sup>243</sup>

How Schlatter connects the two analogues on the noetic level, that is, the movement of his thought from knowledge of God to knowledge of God's works and vice versa, shall particularly concern us in the concluding chapter of this dissertation. What we need to see now is that, on the ontological level, the unity in diversity of creation is grounded in the unity in diversity of God's being.<sup>244</sup> This should be especially clear from what was said earlier about Schlatter's modal ontology of divine action. The knowledge of the irreversibility of this founding relation is consistently present in Schlatter's talk about God's being.<sup>245</sup> This can be demonstrated in Schlatter's exposition of Gen 1:26:

The conception of God in Scripture concentrates most strongly in a divine 'I' . . . However, already on Old Testament ground the awareness broke through that this divine 'I' is not a lonely one. This is also the case here, where the *δύναμις τοῦ θεοῦ* is perceived in its most supreme unfolding. The Trinity is therefore *not exegesis but real explanation* [*Realerklärung*] of this 'we.' It lifts it from the region of presentiment to enhanced brightness in substantiated knowledge. However, this is only possible on the ground of the heightened revelation of God which makes his inner fullness of life in the Son and the Spirit known to the world (emphasis A. L.).<sup>246</sup>

<sup>242</sup> Schlatter's understanding of the triads of human self-consciousness is indeed, as Fraas remarks, problematic in that he does not see the modalistic tendency inherent in them. However, since Schlatter uses these triads merely as illustrations of the unity and diversity in God's being they do not keep him, as we shall see, from developing an adequate picture of God's triune being. Fraas' critique in *Gotteslehre*, 61 therefore only partly applies to Schlatter.

<sup>243</sup> *Dogma*, 34; see also *Gründe*, 29.

<sup>244</sup> Cf. Walldorf, *Realistische Philosophie*, 160-61.

<sup>245</sup> In the correlating endnote to the above quotation, Schlatter explicitly delimitates himself from the attempt "to make discoveries in God through the combination of ideas" (*Dogma*, 559).

<sup>246</sup> \**Genesis*, 39.

The fact that we have trinitarian statements in Schlatter's doctrine of creation must not lead us to conclude that he intends to prove the Trinity on the basis of God's revelation in creation. Rather, the knowledge that the *one being of God* is constituted in the diversity of *three persons* is, in Schlatter, exclusively bound to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.<sup>247</sup>

The following words by Gunton pertinently capture our interpretation of Schlatter's approach. Gunton suggests that

patterns . . . of trinitarian relationality offer possibilities for drawing analogies between the being of God and that of the world. The world reveals the hand that made it in the remarkable combination of unity and diversity, of relationality and particularity, that it manifests, marks that can be recognised by their analogy to the unity and diversity of the triune God. Relevant here is T. F. Torrance's suggestion that we look for parallel rationalities in theology and science, in the sciences of God and of created things. The revelation of the Creator is to be found in the fact that Creator and creation represent parallel structures of meaning, each with its own intrinsic rationality, the one that of the creator, the other that of the created. The latter derives from the former, but 'no argument from created intelligibility, as such, can actually terminate on the Reality of God . . .'. Revelation – God's personal interaction with the world through his Son and Spirit – suggests ways of seeing parallels between uncreated and created rationality . . .<sup>248</sup>

The aforementioned criteria, according to which Schlatter proceeds, apply fully to the analogy he draws between God's thinking and willing *ad extra* and *ad intra*:

The fact that we know God as the willing one also determines our doctrine of the Trinity. We must not illustrate the Trinity merely through the act of thinking [*Denkvorgang*]. For just as the Word is thought, it is also willed. The will is essential to the image of God. The latter is not only the goal of the divine will, rather, because of the completeness of its unity with God, it is itself a willing one. The Word is the Son. Likewise, the Spirit not only sets a unity of thinking but also a unity of will. In this lies the merit of the formula 'three persons' by means of which the analogies taken only from nature are rejected and the completely personal being of God is affirmed even in the inner distinction of the divine life. God does not have forces, objects, or things in himself. Rather, he makes even his Word and his Spirit capable of themselves, makes them alive in themselves, and makes them persons.<sup>249</sup>

The personal agency of God, his thinking and willing, in which he creates, and gives life to, the creature as other than himself is analogically attributed to God's being which means to say that there is aliveness, action and relation in God himself. Schlatter talks about God's

<sup>247</sup> See \**Dogmatik* I, 103-04.

<sup>248</sup> Gunton, *A Brief Theology of Revelation*, 62-63, quoting from T. F. Torrance, *The Ground and Grammar of Theology*, 100.

<sup>249</sup> *Dogma*, 179-80.



perfection in this context.<sup>250</sup> The idea that this inner dynamic enables true otherness in God can only be upheld, Schlatter argues, by employing the analogy of the person as "the highest form of life shown to us – the *selbständigen* owner of a life peculiar to himself."<sup>251</sup> That Schlatter can specify the *analogia operationis* in terms of an *analogia caritatis* should be obvious from our outline of his concept of divine action.

[W]hen we think of God's hidden, inwardly turned life, we not only have to remind ourselves of the completeness of his seeing, which brings forth a word that is like him, nor only of the generating power of his will, which gives himself a willed one who has life like he himself, but of the fact that God, also in his relationship to the eternal Son in the eternal Spirit, is love. The fact that the Son is the beloved one rules out any reduction or gradation in his relation to the Father and gives him the full unity which grants him 'the sameness of being' with the Father.<sup>252</sup>

This quote indicates that the notion of love constitutes the basis for Schlatter's doctrine of the Trinity. His further unfolding of this inner-divine love is conceptually grounded in God's revelation in Christ and the Spirit.

## B. Christ and the Trinity

### i. Christ as "the creator of the Trinitarian concept of God"

God's revelation in the person and work of Jesus Christ is the ground on which Schlatter sees himself enabled to speak about the triune being of God on the basis of God's triune economy. This can be clearly seen in the opening sentence of the passage quoted earlier:

Here is a place where an insight into the inner divine being is possible for us. For in Jesus it is not only divine acting, divine speaking, and divine acts issuing from God which generate effects in the world. Rather, divine life gives itself existence within the world; a divine 'I' makes itself perceivable in a human 'I'. There we stand before the empirical moment which gives our conception of God [*Gottesanschauung*] its trinitarian form.<sup>253</sup>

Yet, the "personal deity . . . revealed to us" is not "clenched by the law of humanness." The way in which this divine "I" relates as the Son to God the Father in the Holy Spirit reveals

<sup>250</sup> See what we have outlined above, p. 126.

<sup>251</sup> *Dogma*, 573.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, 198.

<sup>253</sup> \**Wesen und Quellen*, 158; cf. above, p. 137.

that "the God-power, the God-life, the God-truth" exist "in him as well as above him, and this, of course, in the absolute perfection of a person."<sup>254</sup> These two statements signal the twofold way in which Schlatter takes seriously the giving and creative love of the Father to the Son in the Holy Spirit which leads him to the full affirmation of the *homoousios* of the trinitarian dogma of the Ancient Church.

a) The Father gives deity to the Son, and this giving love is not dependent on a human creature suitable enough to receive it. "Therefore, we speak of the eternal Son of God, of God the Son and of his *Wesensgleichheit* with the Father." An inferiority of the deity of the Son and, consequently, his separation from the Father are thus obviated.

b) Christ's person must not be understood as a temporal mode of appearance of God. This would mean a truncation of the Father's love. As Schlatter critiques: "In this way, the love of God in its relationship to the Son remains incomplete. It does not bring forth a complete giving for it does not prepare for itself an eternal object." Thus, the notion of *Wesensgleichheit* renders any commingling [*Vereinerleung*] of Father and Son impossible.

Along these lines, Schlatter responds to Sabellianism and Arianism: "In the profession of '*Wesenseinheit*,' however, the complete giving, the complete love, is expressed which makes the Son the perfect image of the Father."<sup>255</sup> The communion of love between Father, Son and Holy Spirit as it is revealed in the person and work of Christ is therefore not merely something temporary but "points back to a triune definedness of being [*Wesensbestimmtheit*] in God."

Jesus became the creator of the Trinitarian concept of God by placing his office into the eternal and complete revelation of divine grace, setting the sending of the Spirit beside himself as a second testimony to God. Thereby it became the religion of his community that it possessed its communion with God in fellowship with the Christ and with the Spirit. Jesus never thought of this merely as a temporary form of divine activity, since he conceived of his sonship as being personal and therefore eternal. Moreover, with clear recognition of the Risen One the thought of a disappearance of his office and

<sup>254</sup> See the quotations above, pp. 190, 218.

<sup>255</sup> *Dogma*, 354-55; similarly in *Jesu Gottheit*, 42.

work was completely ruled out. While it always remained a profound mystery how the earthly Christ could claim eternity for himself, the concept of eternity was confirmed by the view of the Risen One and the completeness of his sonship, which united him with the Father, was revealed.<sup>256</sup>

## ii. The Trinity

### a) Persons in communion

Schlatter's doctrine of the ontological Trinity can be seen as the exposition of the sentence that God *is* love.<sup>257</sup> His statements about God's triune being and God's eternal love run parallel to each other: "[T]he glance at the triune one, which gives us an inkling of the eternal love of God," is "that which we reach as the final glance into God's being."<sup>258</sup> In the preceding paragraphs we have seen that the unity of essence between the Father and the Son is the expression of the perfect and eternal love of God. This love is mediated by the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. "The Spirit is the eternal and vivacious bond" which unites the Father and the Son.<sup>259</sup> Therefore, we have to locate Schlatter's thought in the Augustinian tradition which speaks of the Holy Spirit as the *vinculum caritatis*. Yet, we saw Schlatter moving beyond this notion by arguing that the divine love not only establishes unity but also distinctness in God.<sup>260</sup> The background for this is Schlatter's insight that the concept of unity of essence may indeed prevent God-talk from anthropomorphisms. Yet, its weakness is to "place both [Father and Son] in their common glory and

<sup>256</sup> *History of the Christ*, 388.

<sup>257</sup> See above, pp. 122ff.

<sup>258</sup> *Ethik*, 63. Cf. *Dogma*, 196 (love "is the final word that we can reach about") and *ibid.*, 356 ("The trinitarian name of God gives us the final glance into what God is."). See also Neuer, *Zusammenhang*, 118-19; Walldorf, *Realistische Philosophie*, 212.

<sup>259</sup> *Erläuterungen III*, 283.

<sup>260</sup> Gunton critiques the absence of this dimension in Augustine's notion of the divine love: "Because, we might also say, he [Augustine] has an inadequate conception of love as love for the other as other, he is unable to conceive true otherness in the Trinity . . ." (*The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 51).

perfection immovably side by side." Such a static and unlively picture of the oneness of God's being contradicts God's self-revelation in Christ.

[T]he oneness of the Son with the Father is grounded in the fact that the Son, with all that is his, enters into the service of the Father, has his goal in the glory of the Father, and has his rule in his [the Father's] will. Therefore, the Father hands everything over to him and has his goal in the glorification of the Son. The words of Jesus regarding his communion with God powerfully represent how Jesus' supremacy evolves from his subordination to the Father.<sup>261</sup>

The unity of God's being is not an empty unity but embraces plurality. It has the distinctness of the different persons as its precondition and its result, and precisely in this it is perfect unity. We could say that Schlatter conceives of the unity and distinctness of God's being in terms of a simultaneous originality (*Gleichursprünglichkeit*). Crucial is that not only the unifying but also the personifying activity is ascribed to the Holy Spirit. The interrelation and interaction of Father and Son is – in analogy to the role of the Spirit *ad extra* and especially in the life of the incarnate Son – pneumatologically mediated.<sup>262</sup> "A protection against the unliveliness [*Unlebendigkeit*] inherent in the formula 'essence' is given through the fact that the Spirit belongs to the Trinity. The 'one and same essence' in the Father and the Son is Spirit, and the communion between them consists in the Spirit."<sup>263</sup> In this way Schlatter seeks to prevent his concept from collapsing into tritheism as well as modalism: "The disciples did not receive three names of God from Jesus. Neither did they, however,

<sup>261</sup> *Dogma*, 356; cf. *Erläuterungen* II, 631-32.

<sup>262</sup> A similar analogy between the role of the Holy Spirit in the economic and ontological Trinity is developed by Gunton: "Therefore, not only must we say, with Augustine, that the Spirit is the unifying link between Father and Son; it is even more necessary to add that he is the focus of the distinctiveness of Father and Son – of their unique particularity . . . [T]he Spirit's distinctive mode of action in both time and eternity, economy and essence, consists in the constituting and realisation of particularity" (*The One, the Three and the Many*, 190).

<sup>263</sup> *Dogma*, 356. Schlatter touches here on two aspects of the notion of the Holy Spirit in one sentence. On the one hand, he refers to God's Spirit in an absolute sense as to God's divine being (*ousia*). On the other hand, Schlatter makes clear that we are not to flatten out the distinctions between the different persons of the Trinity. Thus, the second part of the citation is directed toward the Holy Spirit as the third person of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit has his own *hypostasis*, his own mode of existence. Although Schlatter himself does not use the term *hypostasis*, he underlines the personal existence of the Holy Spirit in distinction from the persons of Father and Son in the correlating footnote: "In the same way [as with the Father and the Son] only the idea of person is suitable. For in the description of God there is no space for things, neither for the mere force nor the mere idea" (*ibid.*, 589, n. 206). For a detailed outline of these pneumatological issues from the perspective of patristic theology see T. F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 205-31.

receive only one name for a hidden God; rather he was now present with them and was revealed to them in the two bearers of his grace."<sup>264</sup>

b) The inner-trinitarian relations and actions

What follows from the material just outlined is that Schlatter applies the ontogenitive moment of God's love *ad extra* to the eternal being of God. In the divine economy it is especially the love between the Father and the incarnate Son which "corresponds to the archetype of the eternal love."<sup>265</sup> Schlatter does not provide an elaborate concept of the way in which the three persons of the Godhead relate to, and act upon, each other. However, at different places he suggests that within the loving relations between Father, Son and Holy Spirit each actively seeks the other, and in and through this, the particular identity of each is mutually constituted and secured. Schlatter articulates this in the sense of originating relations.<sup>266</sup> The Son is "the eternal recipient of the perfect love of God" and as such "the one begotten through the eternal love in such a way that he has eternity and deity in the Father."<sup>267</sup> We discern here the notion of *monarchia* according to which the Father is, in a special way, the source of the giving and enabling action in the Godhead. As Schlatter puts it with respect to the Apostle Paul:

He never conceived of the Preexistent One's eternal existence in God in terms of rest; this is not permitted by the elementary terms by which he describes God's relationship to the world. If he had wanted to find phrases that depict existence without activity, he would have had to derive them from nature. But his conceptions of God are all taken from personal life. Here life consists in will and activity, and God's will is love which perfects communion by making the Son to be the one who accomplishes his works. Paul assigns to the Father the primary, initial activity that provides the Son with his will and power.<sup>268</sup>

<sup>264</sup> *History of the Christ*, 389.

<sup>265</sup> "Christologie der Bergpredigt," 325.

<sup>266</sup> See e.g. the quotation above, p. 232.

<sup>267</sup> *Jesu Gottheit*, 42; *Dogma*, 475 (in above order). In his critique of Hegel's understanding of the Trinity, Schlatter refers to the begetting of the Son as "*immanente Produktion*" which must not be replaced by a "*transeunte Produktion*" (\**Dogmatik I*, 103).

<sup>268</sup> *Theology of the Apostles*, 254.

However, Schlatter does not reduce the inner-trinitarian relations to relations of origin. The personal exchange between Father and Son is not symmetrical, but this does not exclude that it is reciprocal. "[T]he love of the Father belongs to the Son in whom it awakes the love so that that love is completed to perfect communion." The Son is "the eternal recipient and giver of the divine love."<sup>269</sup> According to Schlatter, the complete communion of love is established when "the gift returns to the giver." Love not only takes but – in the act of receiving and in its way of taking – "generates the pleasure and power of the giver."<sup>270</sup> Hence, in analogy to the movements of the revealed Trinity, the relations and actions in God's being go from, as well as to, the Father.<sup>271</sup> There is a mutual giving and receiving between the Father and the Son in the Spirit. The Son is the Son by means of the gift he receives from Father. However, the Son actively corresponds to the Fatherhood of the Father by giving back what has been received so that the Father is the Father by means of what he receives from the Son. Thus, the subordination of the Son to the Father is essential to the eternal communion of both in the Spirit.

It is not only a consequence of his earthly nature, that means it is not a deficiency of his Sonship that he has God above himself, as if he thought of a future community with God in which lived for himself and glorified only himself. That he stands under the Father and that he – not through himself but through the Father – is lifted into the participation in his glory, is as eternal as the love which unites him with the Father and the Father with him.<sup>272</sup>

In the mutual giving and glorifying between Father and Son, as Schlatter remarks in his exposition of 1Cor 15:27.28, the "perfect love" appears "by which the Father does everything for the Son and the Son everything for the Father."<sup>273</sup> The vivacious and reciprocal

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<sup>269</sup> *Dogma*, 490.

<sup>270</sup> *Jesu Gottheit*, 52; cf. "Christi Versöhnen," 204-05.

<sup>271</sup> See above, p. 152. It is worth noting that the connection between the immanent *processiones* and the economic *missiones* gives Schlatter's doctrine of the Trinity its particular shape. For an elaborate discussion of the necessity to link the immanent processions with the economic missions see e.g. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. I, 311-13, 319-21; Schwöbel, "Christology and Trinitarian Thought," 140.

<sup>272</sup> *Jesu Demut*, 84.

<sup>273</sup> *Erläuterungen II*, 318.

exchange of love in God is of such a perfection that the persons of the Trinity in their mutual constituting and enabling establish the unity of God's being. As Schlatter phrases it, "*Wesenseinheit*" refers to the fact that "everything which is yours, is mine; for the Son is and wills nothing apart from the Father, as the Father is and wills nothing apart from the Son."<sup>274</sup> Through these words Schlatter leaves no doubt that the otherness of Father and Son and the resulting asymmetry of the relations from the one to the other does not stand in contradiction to the deity of both in which they mutually constitute each other.<sup>275</sup>

c) Conclusion: the Trinity – being in action

As Schlatter was himself aware, his doctrine of the Trinity lacks in a final elaborateness. His thoughts move hastily towards the affirmation of basic features of the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. Schlatter's hesitation to talk about the inner life of God can be explained on the basis of his "empirical theology" and its deep respect for the mystery of God. However, in our view, Schlatter could have applied his knowledge of the economic Trinity as it is revealed in Christ more extensively to his concept of the ontological Trinity without speculating unduly. Along these lines it seems appropriate to point to the disappearance of the Holy Spirit as the major weakness of Schlatter's approach. Although Schlatter clearly affirms that the Spirit exercises divine functions in his own person *ad extra* as well as *ad intra*, the role of the third person of the Trinity concerning the inner life of God is merely marginally outlined.<sup>276</sup> Put straightforwardly, Schlatter gives away the op-

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<sup>274</sup> *Jesu Gottheit*, 42.

<sup>275</sup> Cf. how Athanasius connected the notion of the Father's *monarchia* with the daring thought that the Father is not Father without the Son and does not have his deity without the Son. See Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. I, 322-23; T. F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 312-13.

<sup>276</sup> How such an outline could look is adumbrated in Schlatter's exposition of 1Cor 2:10: "Paul's concept of God is trinitarian for he places the Spirit in own existence before God" (*Paulus der Bote*, 117).

portunity to substantiate fully his claim regarding the eternal personhood of the Holy Spirit.<sup>277</sup>

Yet, as we have been able to show, Schlatter has something to say about the inner life of God.<sup>278</sup> According to him, the "concept of the Trinity" is the "explication of the divine life."<sup>279</sup> Schlatter's concept of the inner-trinitarian relations and actions of love constitutes the basis for his conviction that God's being must not be conceived of as static and immovable being but as dynamic being, as being in action.<sup>280</sup> This interpenetration of being and relation, being and action, cannot be established if God's being is conceived of as substance. For in the latter concept, plurality is regarded as something external to God's being. "Unity remains the "kernel" which sits beneath the attributes – mysteriously, indefinable and empty."<sup>281</sup> However, as the above quotes have shown, the unity of essence is nothing which – as something unknowable – underlies the three persons. Rather, it is realised and takes place in the mutual exchange of love between Father and Son in the Holy Spirit. The particular persons are what they are by virtue of what they give to, and receive from, each other so that, together with the one person, the two other persons are always given.

However, this concept of the divine *Wesenseinheit* must not be understood in the sense of an ontological actualism in which any substantiality conditioning and carrying the actions and relations is denied.<sup>282</sup> In other words, the being of the particular persons must not be dissolved in some kind of process of becoming. As Schlatter argues in his rejection of

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<sup>277</sup> Fraas' critique in this respect is therefore understandable but overshoots the mark (*Gotteslehre*, 91-92).

<sup>278</sup> This needs to be said against Kindt's comment that Schlatter refrains from more specific propositions about the life-process of God (*Gedanke der Einheit*, 67-68).

<sup>279</sup> \**Dogmatik* I, 104.

<sup>280</sup> This is well presented by Neuer, *Zusammenhang*, 58-60 and Walldorf, *Realistische Philosophie*, 190-92. The latter hints at a link between Schlatter's notion of life, relation and his concept of the Trinity.

<sup>281</sup> \**Dogmatik* I, 104.

<sup>282</sup> Cf. above, p. 218 n. 193.



the notion of God as *causa sui*: "The biblical God does not come about, does not become, ἦν ἐν ἑαυτῷ, he is. Jn. 5:26: the Father has life in himself ἐν ἑαυτῷ not out of himself; he has it as his own property without having to process himself into life."<sup>283</sup> Thus, God is not subjected to a process of becoming, rather, his being is eternally and unchangeably a dynamic and active being. Schlatter even speaks of "the complete interpenetration" of "being and becoming" in God's being.<sup>284</sup> We would therefore endorse Walldorf's conclusion: "In that Schlatter thus conceives of being and becoming (acting) in God as unity, he walks on the middle course between the unmoved mover of Aristotle and process theology . . ."<sup>285</sup>

### C. The Trinity, Christ and the divine love *ad extra*

#### i. The triune communion of love as the ontological basis of God's love *ad extra*

In our exposition of Schlatter's christology we have elaborated that the love between Father and Son in the Holy Spirit is indissolubly connected with Christ's love *pro nobis*. Schlatter's understanding of the Trinity allows him to draw out these lines completely by outlining the inner-trinitarian love of God as the ground of God's love toward, and in, creation. This, as the following quotes will show, is also the culminating point of Schlatter's understanding of the trinitarian mediation of divine action. With regard to God's agency of creation and redemption, Schlatter states in his exegesis of Heb 1:2:

It is, however, a great truth that we are – already from the origin of our natural life – completely dependent upon Christ, that everything we receive from God – down to our existence – is given to us through him, that the love of the Father for the Son is the root of our whole existence and generates the whole course of the world.<sup>286</sup>

<sup>283</sup> \**Kritische Bemerkungen*, 7.

<sup>284</sup> \**Dogmatik I*, 105: ". . . der Sein und Werden in ganzer Durchdringung in sich seiende."

<sup>285</sup> Walldorf, *Realistische Philosophie*, 192.

<sup>286</sup> *Erläuterungen III*, 189. In this context Schlatter goes as far as to say that "God brought forth the creation for his Son in order that it be his kingdom that belongs to him" (188). Cf. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. II, 21-22: "The goodness of the Father as Creator, by which he gives and upholds the existence of his creatures, is not different, however, from the love with which the Father from all eternity loves the Son . . ."

For Schlatter, "the eternal grace turned toward man" is grounded "in the eternal love given to the Son by God."<sup>287</sup> Hence, God's salvific action is not only mediated through Christ but also originates in the eternal love between Father and Son.

Concerning our calling to Christ, we should not think that through it something completely new arises of which God did not think earlier. Rather, it unveils to us that which always had its ground in the eternal communion of Christ with the Father. The love of God is eternally directed toward us; God's decree of creation [*Schöpfungsrat*] is united with his decree of grace [*Gnadenrat*]. For the love of God, which elects us to communion with God, has in the eternal Son, who – through his deity – is with God, not only its executive organ but also its supporting foundation.<sup>288</sup>

Schlatter explicitly states the link between the Trinity and the divine action *pro nobis* in the context of election:

We are chosen in the Son, eternally loved in the eternal Son . . . The notion of the Trinity and the notion of election are closely linked with each other. The Son's eternal communion with the Father comprises our election, and therefore our election includes also our calling for him, our faith in him, our love for him and our work for him. But these do not give grace its beginning; rather, the foundation and beginning of grace is God.<sup>289</sup>

In sum, it is the eternal love between Father, Son and Holy Spirit, which is actuated when God relates to, and acts upon, that which is other than himself. On account of this, we are able to understand Schlatter's argument for the identity of the immanent and the economic Trinity.<sup>290</sup> Because God is in himself love; being in relation; being in action, the trinitarian way of his relating to, and acting toward, man can be explicated as the self-disclosure of the triune God.

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. In the Son is the origin of all that differs from the Father, and therefore of the creatures' independence vis-à-vis the Father."

<sup>287</sup> *Theology of the Apostles*, 254.

<sup>288</sup> *Erläuterungen II*, 548. We owe this reference to P. Brunner who provides an astute discussion of the question "Why is there not nothing?" in "Gott, das Nichts und die Kreatur," 33-36.

<sup>289</sup> *Dogma*, 479.

<sup>290</sup> See the citations above, p. 137 n. 204; p. 222 n. 207.

ii. The transcendence of the triune God and the life of the creature

a) The doctrine of the Trinity in its critical function for christology

The point that now requires our full attention is that Schlatter's way of relating the divine love *ad intra* and *ad extra*, the ontological and the economic Trinity, does *not* entail the element of a relational symmetry between the relata. While the inner relations and actions are constitutive of God's being and, as such, ontologically constitutive of God's agency *ad extra*, his relation to, and action toward, that which is not God is *not* constitutive of what he is. Schlatter is aware that christology is the primary locus where this distinction needs to be made. His idea of the "ethical moment" of Jesus' divine Sonship and of the mutual relationship between the incarnate Son and the Father must be safeguarded against the misinterpretation that the Fatherhood of the Father is dependent upon a creative act in and toward creation by which he generates a human being as his Son. Schlatter's statements in this respect do not lack in the necessary clarity and differentiation:

What God is for us does not come about in time and is not subject to becoming and decay. God's will has eternal status, even the will in which he calls us to himself and makes us alive for himself. It does not follow according to that which we experience and work in time, but it precedes not only our work but also our existence because it is God's own will.

This is the manner in which also we take part in God's eternity and constitutes – proportioned to the order of our life [*Lebensmaß*] – the analogy to the pre-existent being of the eternal Son. He, however, is the one begotten through the eternal love in such a way that he has eternity and deity in the Father. We take part in God's eternal love only in such a way that he envisages our image in his eternal sight and unites his grace with the latter, thereby achieving that we – in the course of time at our place – enter into life and receive the effects of his eternal will through history.<sup>291</sup>

In this is clearly stated that the Fatherhood of the Father is independent of his creative action and relation *ad extra* because it is eternally realised in his communion with the eternal Son. Thus, Schlatter's affirmation of the *homousios* reappears – so to speak retrospectively – in its fundamental import for his theology.<sup>292</sup> The interlocking of christology and

<sup>291</sup> *Dogma*, 474-75. See e.g. the statement quoted above, p. 181 n. 37.

<sup>292</sup> For the conceptual importance of the insight "that while God was always Father, he was not always Creator or Maker" see T. F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 84-89; Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. II, 367-71; Stickelbroeck, *Christologie im Horizont der Seinsfrage*, 108-10.

the doctrine of the immanent Trinity is the conceptual basis on which Schlatter is able to maintain the ontological distinction between Christ's deity and humanity. Precisely for this reason, as we have seen above, he can positively relate both in such a way that he presents us neither with a humanised God nor with a deified man.

b) The doctrine of the Trinity in its critical function for the theological assignment of God and creation

The ultimate conceptual securing of God's transcendence vis-à-vis the creature – one of the crucial aspects of Schlatter's theory of divine action – is achieved through the doctrine of the ontological Trinity. This can be demonstrated on the basis of Schlatter's brief outline of different scenarios which arise "where the concept of the Trinity is missing."<sup>293</sup>

Schlatter touches upon those conceptions in which God's aliveness is conceived of as mediated by something external to God. This is the case when a) God is ascribed a body, b) the world is conceived of as the divine body and God as the world-soul, c) God is ascribed vivacity by placing him into a community, a family that stems from him, a council of gods, or a community of angels. In all these approaches Schlatter discerns "a darkening of God's unity" because "a distinction is established not in him but at him [*nicht in ihm, sondern an ihm*]." The consequence is that "God obtains his completion in the world and is in need of that which is not God." This conceptual failure to create space between God and world leads all too easily to the renunciation of "our life in order that God in the world remains with himself." Finally, as the history of the Jewish concept of God shows, the prayer directed to the angels reappears in a strongly monotheistic context.<sup>294</sup>

<sup>293</sup> The following quotations refer to *Dogma*, 34-35. See also \**Dogmatik* I, 100-06.

<sup>294</sup> Cf. the second part of Schwöbel's two-fold thesis expounded in "Radical Monotheism and the Trinity": "[O]nly a proper trinitarian theology can be radically monotheistic theology" (74).

Schlatter argues that the confirmation of monotheism together with the simultaneous rejection of the internal aliveness of God results in the abolition of human life. With reference to Islam, Schlatter states: "In immutable identity with itself the divine thinking and willing stands still in eternal perfection. Thus, man does not gain the reason for his thinking and willing in him [the immutable God] but merely the placement into passivity." In antithesis to such conceptions stands the "Hegelian Trinity." Yet, even here, Schlatter points out, God is made dependent upon that which is not God.

The aliveness of God takes place in the life of the creature. Through this the unity is lost. The *pleroma* of God pours itself out, it flows away from him. He does not have the power to see an image in himself that is with him and is himself. He does not have the power to beget the Son in himself who is not something different than himself but stands in absolute unity with him. He replaces the immanent through the *transeunte* production.<sup>295</sup>

Finally, the incapacity to secure the transcendence of God's being re-occurs in the attempt to explicate God's life through the concept of substance. The fullness is understood as epiphenomenal to the unity of God's being. Hence, the concept of God is rendered "the other part of the antithesis" between God and the world. "*Dem Werdenden steht er als der Seiende gegenüber, nicht als der Sein und Werden in ganzer Durchdringung in sich seiende.*"<sup>296</sup> The problems which arise when God is simply contrasted to the world were outlined earlier.<sup>297</sup>

The *cantus firmus* of these different scenarios is that without the doctrine of the immanent Trinity, dogmatics is divested of its conceptual means to affirm the reality, freedom and distinctness of God in relation to that which is not God. Put positively, the absolute ontological distinction between God's being and creaturely being is secured through the fact that God – in the eternal communion of Father, Son and Holy Spirit – can completely real-

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<sup>295</sup> \**Dogmatik* I, 103.

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>297</sup> See above, pp. 88ff.

ise himself without being in need of any action or counterpart *ad extra* in order to become or be God. God is eternally in himself a communion of love, he has life in himself, and therefore he is independent of any object *ad extra* for the realisation of his love, his aliveness, his personalness, his will, his Word and his blessedness. Hence, when Schlatter rejects the respective theological conceptions of Hegelian provenance by referring to God's superiority, omni-sufficiency (*Allgenugsamkeit*), independence and transcendence, his argument – and this is the point to see – stands ultimately on trinitarian grounds, that is, on his notion of "the in-himself-vivacious and blessed, only-true God of Scripture."<sup>298</sup>

What we have here is a concept of divine transcendence which carries through conceptually precisely because God is not simply contrasted to the world. This also secures the freedom and integrity of creaturely existence; for only a God who is independent from what is not God can – in his free and unconditioned love – create, enable, redeem and perfect a free creation. Thus, Schlatter obviates any pantheistic tendencies which collapse either God into the world or the world into God. The underlying differentiation between the ontological and the economic Trinity could be summarised as follows: the triune God is what he is eternally in himself. His triune way of acting toward, and relating to, the creature is the actualisation of his eternal love *ad extra* and has – as a volitional act of his free love – an absolute beginning in time and space.<sup>299</sup>

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<sup>298</sup> \**Kritische Bemerkungen*, 20. The whole manuscript is illuminating in this context. See especially pp. 4-11, 17-22. Cf. Neuer, *Zusammenhang*, 60; Walldorf, *Realistische Philosophie*, 192.

<sup>299</sup> Cf. Peter Brunner's differentiation between the ontological and the economic Trinity and his conclusion: "God does not need a world, God does not need angels nor human beings in order to be God" ("Die Freiheit des Menschen," 109). Without trying to prove a direct dependence on Schlatter, whose *Dogma* Brunner thoroughly studied (see Walldorf, *Realistische Philosophie*, 265 n. 130), the affinity to Schlatter's outline in *Dogma* 34-35 cannot be overlooked.

## CHAPTER V. TRINITARIAN DEPTH STRUCTURES IN SCHLATTER'S THEOLOGY

Our objective in this concluding chapter is to summarise and secure the essential results of this study. In this way, we shall bring the trinitarian depth structures of Schlatter's theory of divine action to the surface. In a second step, we will briefly indicate how single structural elements could deepen our understanding of the whole of Schlatter's dogmatics.<sup>1</sup>

### 1. The Doctrine of the Trinity as the Ontological Basis of Schlatter's Concept of Divine Action

The eternal love between Father and Son in the Holy Spirit – as it is revealed in the person and work of Christ – is, according to Schlatter, the ontological basis of the divine economy *ad extra*. We think that – in the face of the above results – Schlatter is not over-interpreted when we further specify this ontological founding-relation.

#### A. The Trinity and the modal ontology of divine action

We can speak of a constructive function of the doctrine of the Trinity for Schlatter's understanding of the mode of divine agency *ad extra*.<sup>2</sup> The personal mode of action – God's grace and love – and the onto-constitutive moment of divine agency are rooted in the communion between Father and Son in the Holy Spirit. The mutual love, the reciprocal

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<sup>1</sup> Some of the aspects outlined in this chapter have been adumbrated in Loos, "Divine Action and the Trinity," 272-77.

<sup>2</sup> See above, Chapter III. 5. A.

giving and receiving in which the trinitarian persons constitute each other, is actuated *ad extra* in that God creates, enables, redeems and perfects the creature as other than himself. Of central importance in this connection is Schlatter's clear grasp of the dynamic orientation towards the particular and the other – an "outgoingness", we may say, which is essential to God's relations and actions of love *ad intra* as well as *ad extra*. Thus, the factuality and the modality of the trinitarian economy are grounded in the eternal communion of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, a communion which is revealed in the story of Jesus Christ. In other words, Schlatter answers the question about the "Why" and the "How" of God's relation to, and action toward, creation by referring to the immanent and eternal love of the triune God. Schlatter's modal ontology of divine action rests on an *analogia operationis* which has to be specified as an *analogia caritatis*. That Schlatter consistently reflects these analogies pneumatologically completes the trinitarian character of his concept and uncovers the remarkable affinity to the thought of trinitarian theologians such as Colin Gunton:

The third person of the Trinity is the one whose function is to make the love of God a love that is opened towards that which is not itself, to perfect it in otherness. Because God is not in himself a closed circle but is essentially the relatedness of a community, there is within his eternal being that which freely and in love creates, reconciles and redeems that which is not himself. The relation of God to the creation, which is expressed in creation, reconciliation and redemption, is grounded in the other-related love of the Father, Son and Spirit in eternity. It is the particular being and function of the Spirit to be the dynamic of the love, both in itself and towards the world.<sup>3</sup>

Along the aforementioned lines, Schlatter's ontology of love and giving entails aspects of a trinitarian ontology. Schlatter is not concerned primarily with finding *Ternare*, that is, triadic structures in creation. Rather, he seeks to outline the actuality of creaturely being as the gift of God's love and, hence, as grounded in the eternal love of the Trinity. As Bieler puts it, a trinitarian ontology

*müsste* im Lichte der Trinitätslehre und in innerer Offenheit auf die Heilsökonomie den Gabecharakter der Wirklichkeit zu entfalten suchen, d.h. die Schöpfung als durch den Prozess der trinitarischen Hervorgänge ermöglichte Seinsmitteilung und die darin enthaltenen Implikationen bedenken.

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<sup>3</sup> Gunton, "God the Holy Spirit," 128.



*Wie oben gezeigt worden ist, stellt sich der Prozess der trinitarischen Hervorgänge als das Leben der Liebe selbst dar. Eine trinitarische Ontologie kann demnach nur analogia caritatis sein.*<sup>4</sup>

The *analogia caritatis* gives rise to an *analogia relationis*. This is not surprising when we recall Schlatter's conviction that the communion between Father and Son in the Spirit – as it is revealed in Christ – "provides *the rule* according to which also in us, proportional to our measure, the divine and the human enter into unity." The same love which constitutes the communion in distinctness between the three persons of the Godhead, institutes a relationship between God and man which is best expressed as relatedness without absorption, community in otherness. Schlatter's concept of the non-competitive relation between God and man must be seen as the consequent application of this principle of the triune love. At this point, the constructive function of the doctrine of the Trinity depends on the differentiation between the immanent and the economic Trinity. Through this, Schlatter maintains the ineradicable ontological difference between the two analogues which consists in the fact that the communion of love in God exists from eternity and is perfectly realised in the mutual exchange of giving and receiving, whereas the relational pattern between God and man is *not* mutually established but solely grounded in God's one-sided acting and has come about in time. It is only in this way that the other-related love of God *ad intra* can be conceived of as truly other-related love *ad extra* so that the particular identity and integrity of each – God and man – is secured. In our view, this conceptual securing – and not a speculative deduction of God's inner being – is the prime reason why we find statements about the immanent Trinity in Schlatter's anthropology.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Bieler, *Freiheit als Gabe*, 454. See also Schulz, *Sein und Trinität*, 891: "Das Sein bekundet Gottes Liebe, ihn als Geber von Leben. Sein wird gegeben, es gibt *sich* nicht selbst als Subjekt . . . Versteht man das Sein als Gabe, verweist es in dieser Hinsicht auf den Hl. Geist, der innertrinitarisch und ökonomisch Gott als Gabe und Liebe darstellt und vermittelt . . ."

<sup>5</sup> See *Dogma*, 34-35, 148, 179-80, 198 and what we have outlined above, Chapter IV. 2. A. iv.

In Schlatter, we could summarise, the doctrine of the immanent Trinity – as it is revealed in the person and work of Christ – explains a) the ground and mode of God's action toward, and relationship with, the human person and b) why God's being is not constituted in this interaction and interrelation.<sup>6</sup> In thus meeting one of the central desiderata for a theory of divine action in a trinitarian way,<sup>7</sup> Schlatter's thought can be seen in obvious proximity to a fundamental aspect of contemporary trinitarian theology: "It is the relation-in-otherness between God and the world that is conceived with the help of the doctrine of the Trinity, and probably cannot adequately be conceived in any other way."<sup>8</sup>

### **B. The Trinity and the structural theory of divine action**

Schlatter's approach opens up the possibility of understanding God's triune economy as the manifestation and revelation of God's triune being.<sup>9</sup> The unity in diversity of the divine agency and work is affirmed and grounded in the trinitarian relationality of God's being. Schlatter differentiates between three dimensions of divine action and links each with the respective person of the Trinity. Yet in every act appropriated to the one person, the action of the two other persons is also given, which is to say that every act of God entails the threefold dimensionality of divine agency so that God can be conceived of as the one agent of all divine actions. Schlatter relates the divine works according to the same relational pattern. The distinct works are, in a specific way, appropriated to a particular person, and precisely in this diversity they constitute the one *Heilsgeschichte* of God with the creature, a

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<sup>6</sup> This statement is articulated in imitation of Schwöbel, *God: Action and Revelation*, 43.

<sup>7</sup> See above, p. 96.

<sup>8</sup> Gunton, "Relation and Relativity," 97; similarly idem, *Christ and Creation*, 75; *The Trinitarian Creator*, 9-10. See also, just to mention a few, Greshake, *Der dreieine Gott*, 219-43; Bieler, *Freiheit als Gabe*, 211-17; Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. II, 20-35.

<sup>9</sup> See especially the quotations above, pp. 137 and 222.

history which – through the fall and sin of man – assumes the character of *Erlösungsgeschichte*.

In all this, Schlatter grounds the continuity and inner relatedness between the different divine works not in a supposed continuity between the world and God, but in the transcendence and unchangeable faithfulness of God. Two aspects need to be highlighted in this context which, again, bring to light the trinitarian depth structure of Schlatter's conception:

a) Only a God whose love for the world is grounded in his triune being and thus independent of the love of the world can – even in the face of human sin – remain faithful to his self-determination to be the God *pro nobis*. b) Only a God who acts "in the freedom of the one who gives out of his spontaneous love" can accomplish those creative acts by which a sinful world is kept from falling back into nothingness.

This indicates that Schlatter's trinitarian concept of divine action is capable of doing justice to the diversity of the divine actions and works, especially when this diversity assumes the form of a discontinuity and – because of the sinfulness of man – of an antithesis between the old and the new.<sup>10</sup> In this way the historical and factual event-character of God's *Heilsgeschichte* is affirmed.<sup>11</sup> This includes also the recognition of God's *opus alienum*. Especially those actions in which God – in his wrath and judgement – acts against

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<sup>10</sup> See above, Chapter III. 5. B. ii.

<sup>11</sup> This is the point at which Schlatter's concept diverges from Schwöbel's understanding of the relation between the *opera trinitatis ad extra* (see Schwöbel, "Divine Agency and Providence," 229-41; *God: Action and Revelation*, 31-44; "Trinitätslehre als Rahmentheorie," 37-43). Notwithstanding the obvious parallels between the two approaches, Schlatter would see the factual event-character of God's agency endangered in Schwöbel's notion of the "three types of divine agency: God's creative action as the constitution of created being; God's revelatory action as the disclosure of truth about the relationship of God the creator to his reconciled creation and God's inspiring action as the enabling of certainty concerning the truth about the constitution of reality." Schwöbel links these three types with the three persons of the Trinity (see *God: Action and Revelation*, 35 and 43). According to Schlatter, the divine work of Christ cannot be reduced to revelation for it is creative action: "... a becoming *takes place* through it; it institutes something new; it reveals *in that it creates*" (*Dienst*, 81).

his creatures presuppose his transcendence vis-à-vis, and independence of, his creatures.<sup>12</sup> Even if these acts remain incomprehensible and can hardly be integrated into the homogeneous and teleological structure of God's agency; even if they do not reveal God in the same way as do his actions of grace, they are, nevertheless, actions of the one and same God.<sup>13</sup> This notion of the interrelation of unity and diversity in the triune economy is pushed to its limits in Schlatter's understanding of the cross of Christ. The actional unity of Father and Son gives rise to the utmost tension and distinction between the two in that the Father hands over the Son into the Godforsakenness of sinful man. A trinitarian theology which remains *theologia crucis* is capable of doing justice to both principles: *opera trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa et distincta*.<sup>14</sup>

## 2. Trinitarian Forms of Thought

### A. Dogmatic thinking in methodological obedience to God's triune economy

The trinitarian depth structure of Schlatter's thought consists in the way in which he relates statements about God's triune being; about God's triune action toward, and relationship with, the world (especially man); about the relationality of the divine actions and works, and about the relational and dynamic character of creaturely being. We have located the ontological basis of this concept in the communion of love between the Father

<sup>12</sup> See above, Chapter II. 2. C. iv.

<sup>13</sup> Crucial in this connection are Schlatter's statements on the incomprehensibility of God's agency in and through nature and history (see e.g. *Dogma*, 265, 473; 561; *Ethik*, 279; *Briefe*, 65; *Metaphysik*, 86; "Wert und Unwert," 262; "Heilige Geschichte," 222-23; *Marienreden*, 19; "Atheistic Methods," 223; *Philosophische Arbeit*, 283; "Theology of the New Testament and Dogmatics," 199) and on the hiddenness of God through nature and history (see *Dogma*, 51; 85; *Ruf Jesu*, 322; Walldorf, *Realistische Philosophie*, 262, nn. 121, 122).

<sup>14</sup> Without pursuing these issues any further, the problem that the unity and diversity of divine agency cannot always be integrated satisfactorily must not lead to the suggestion "*die Identifikation der Trinitätslehre mit der allgemeinen Gotteslehre zu zerbrechen*" and to understand "*die Trinitätslehre als Lehre vom opus proprium*" (see Roth, "Trinitätslehre als Rahmentheorie?," 62, 65).

and the Son in the Holy Spirit as it is actualised and revealed in the person and work of Christ.<sup>15</sup> Schlatter's theology presents itself to us – once more – as a theology of love.<sup>16</sup>

On the noetic level we discern a twofold movement of dogmatic thinking which can easily be demonstrated with respect to the notion of unity in plurality. On the one hand, Schlatter moves from statements about God's works and agency to propositions about God's triune being. This is the *prima facie* movement of Schlatter's dogmatic thinking which we have purposely followed in our study. However, in doing so we discovered a second movement: from knowledge of God's triune being to knowledge of his actions and works. Our point here is pertinently summarised by Schlatter himself with regard to Paul's sociology and ecclesiology:

The sociology of Paul, when we ask for its grounds, cannot be outlined without his theology. Why did the fascination about the ideal of homogeneity wane for him? The acting God carries in himself the inexhaustible fullness which reveals itself in the endlessness of the formations. . . . Here we stand at the point where we must elucidate to ourselves what Paul meant when he talked about Christ and the Spirit. The divine acting, which Paul meant to perceive, did not disintegrate, however, into isolated effects in the individuals but created the complete and remaining community. Thus, the tension between the appreciation of individuality and the establishment of commonality lay behind him, and he gained the community that brings forth, secures and preserves the individual life, and [gained] the individualised persons who use everything they are for the community because they do not live for themselves.<sup>17</sup>

At the end of his metaphysical treatise of unity and plurality, Schlatter articulates the twofold dynamic of dogmatic thinking as follows: "The theological statement therefore presupposes that the metaphysical theorem is given to us, and the latter in turn receives its securing and grounding through the fact that the certainty of the one God is given to us."<sup>18</sup> Schlatter concludes that a veridical perception and understanding of the metaphysical categories of unity and plurality is only possible through the theological concept of God who,

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. Schwöbels outline of what he calls the "*proto-trinitarian depth structure*" of the New Testament ("Christology and Trinitarian Thought," 121-28; "God is Love," 312; "Trinitätslehre als Rahmentheorie," 32-37). One has only to read Gunton's *The One, the Three and the Many*, 180-231 in order to see the dogmatic-structural parallels between his theology and that of Schlatter.

<sup>16</sup> For further aspects of Schlatter's theology of love see Neuer, "Introduction *Dienst*," 7-15 and Rieger, *Rechtfertigungslehre*, 380-97.

<sup>17</sup> "Schätzung der Individualität," 126.

<sup>18</sup> *Metaphysik*, 39.

in his unity in plurality, creates and establishes the same in their mutuality.<sup>19</sup> This idea must not only be applied to the issue of unity and plurality. Rather, the goal of Schlatter's *Metaphysik* is "to revise fundamentally the metaphysical thinking of pre-Christian antiquity and to develop a new metaphysics in propriety to God's revelation in Christ."<sup>20</sup>

Is it not the case that, because we receive our relationship to God from Jesus and with it a new ethics, even the ideas by means of which we interpret the world are set into a movement that renews them? Did not Jesus, because he gives our religion a turn which we thankfully praise as our reconciliation with God, also create the epoch in our understanding of nature and the psychical life so that he also grants us a new metaphysics?<sup>21</sup>

The twofold movement in Schlatter's dogmatic thinking is the specification of the indissoluble connection between knowledge of God's being and knowledge of God's actions and works as we have sketched out in the opening chapter of this dissertation:

Was I not supposed to forget the world in order to open myself toward God, and likewise to forget God in order to be open toward the world? However, the necessity to reject this thought prevailed in me again and again. For there is no movement toward God which separates us from what shows itself to us as God's work. The twofold direction of our glance that turns it to God and to the world is ineradicably given to us parallel to the twofold direction of love which we owe to God and to the brothers. For we can neither separate God from his works nor his works from God – for which reason we receive the love that turns us toward the world together with the love that is directed toward God.<sup>22</sup>

Schlatter explains that this figure of thought is to be derived from the course of God's saving economy.

It is impossible that the concept of God has the meaning of a single locus which is coordinated with other loci in the whole of dogmatics. The doctrines of God, Scripture, sin and reconciliation are not to be regarded as coordinated quantities. God is of principle importance to the whole dogmatic circle of ideas [*dogmatischen Begriffskreis*]. Hence, he is also the goal-category [*Zielbegriff*] which must rule the whole of dogmatic thinking. *Ex auton kai eis auton ta panta*. This is the all embracing law for the course of the world as well as for the course of dogmatic thinking.<sup>23</sup>

On these grounds, Schlatter's dogmatic method of thinking can no longer be understood without considering his trinitarian concept of divine action. For what is ontologically

<sup>19</sup> *Metaphysik*, 39. See also Neuer, *Zusammenhang*, 160.

<sup>20</sup> Neuer, "Introduction *Metaphysik*," 2; cf. idem, *Adolf Schlatter: ein Leben*, 530; Walldorf, *Realistische Philosophie*, 30-34.

<sup>21</sup> *Metaphysik*, 18. Cf. Schlatter's notion of "*glaubensgemäß denken*" (to think in propriety to faith) in "Unterwerfung," 10-12, 47-50.

<sup>22</sup> *Rückblick*, 224.

<sup>23</sup> \**Christologie*, 3.

the case – the reciprocity of the inner divine loving and giving and its actualisation *ad extra* through the mediation of the Son and the Spirit – is made the governing principle at the noetic level. Along these lines von Lüpke states: "To ask theologically for God means to follow the 'logic' of his gift."<sup>24</sup> In this, Schlatter's own insight is reflected that "the method of the dogmatic development of ideas . . . is formed according to its object."<sup>25</sup> We may say that Schlatter's thinking takes place in methodological obedience to God's triune economy. In this respect, T. F. Torrance's formulation can be taken as a pertinent summary of what we see in Schlatter:

Since *οικονομία* refers to the way God has Himself taken in His action for us and our salvation, and we know no other divine method of revealing or saving, it must be in strict accordance with that *οικονομία* that we are to think and speak of Him in all His ways and works. . . . To think and speak *κατ'οικονομίαν* is to think and speak truly of God, that is, in accordance with His own nature as revealed in His acts and words.<sup>26</sup>

Before we open up some trinitarian perspectives concerning the whole of Schlatter's dogmatics, two aspects need to be underscored. First, the point of intersection between God's triune being *ad intra* and his agency *ad extra*, is Christ. This christocentricity applies also to Schlatter's method of thinking. As we have laboured to show, Christ is the rule of thought according to which Schlatter applies aspects of his knowledge of God's triune being to his concept of God's triune agency and *vice versa*. This echoes Schlatter's fundamental conviction that "[t]heology remains for always christology; comprehension of Jesus' image; insight into his story."<sup>27</sup> Second, the co-equality and simultaneity in which Schlatter executes the two movements of theological thinking makes instantly clear that he uses the doctrine of the Trinity neither as an abstract ideal nor as an *a priori* principle for constructing a theory of divine action and a view of this world as God's creation. Therefore, in no

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<sup>24</sup> von Lüpke, Preface to *Glaube und Wirklichkeit*, 11.

<sup>25</sup> \**Christologie*, 7.

<sup>26</sup> T. F. Torrance, "The Implications of *Oikonomia* for Knowledge and Speech of God," 238.

<sup>27</sup> *Gründe*, 68.

way do we claim to have found *the* principle of Schlatter's theology in the Trinity, for which reason we speak of trinitarian depth structures. Because Schlatter's theology is not the result of a trinitarian deductionism, it does not require an explicitly trinitarian point of departure in order to be understood. Nevertheless, central aspects of his dogmatics have their inner-theological basis in his doctrine of the Trinity and unfold their full meaning when they are outlined from a trinitarian perspective.

## B. Trinitarian Perspectives

### i. Schlatter's linking of knowledge of God's being and knowledge of God's agency

Schlatter's insistence on talking about God's being on the grounds of God's agency and works is grounded, as Neuer elaborates, in his epistemology, his understanding of revelation and his attempt to elucidate the content of Christian faith to non-Christians as well.<sup>28</sup> We are now also able to explicate Schlatter's theology of God's works as the methodological application of the outgoingness of the Trinity towards the particular and concrete reality of this world. Concisely stated, the Trinity's free and loving orientation toward creation becomes the orientation of Schlatter's dogmatics. One way of putting it is to say, with Klaus Bockmühl: "When God is 'decided towards the earth' (A. Delp), then theology does not have any other choice than doing likewise."<sup>29</sup> Indeed, Schlatter's theological method in this context is not expressive of an epistemological lack of a better foundation for knowledge of God. Rather, Schlatter takes seriously, at the noetic level, what is true ontologically, namely God's triune being in action.

The interrelation between God's being and agency concerns not only Schlatter's method of knowing but also the existential execution of this method. This means that the

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<sup>28</sup> See above, p. 9 n. 9.

<sup>29</sup> Bockmühl, *Leiblichkeit und Gesellschaft*, 274. Cf. above, p. 193.



theologian actually participates in the dynamic of God's giving love.<sup>30</sup> The idea of methodological obedience – and thus the radical *a posteriori* character of theology – culminates in Schlatter's conviction that "[e]very scientific method must adapt itself to its object. The theologian speaks about the one to whom he belongs."<sup>31</sup> Knowledge of God is only possible through God's own revelatory action. "If we want to know God, then 'we can only think of him as the one who is active, not as the one who is subordinate to our knowing, but as the one who is superior to us and who lifts us up into his knowledge. *God is not only object, but primarily subject whose own activity conditions all our knowledge of him*'" (emphasis Walldorf).<sup>32</sup> The "*cogitor, ergo sum ergo cogito*" applies therefore especially to theological knowing: "'Knowing because of being known,' Mt 11:27; Gal 4:9; 1Cor 8:3; this is the basic rule of the New Testament knowledge of God."<sup>33</sup> Consequently, theology is from beginning to end a thinking-after God (*ein Nach-Denken Gottes*) enabled through God's bestowing action through his Word and his Spirit. "[W]e have to give back to him [God] his image because and in the way that we have received it from him; as those who are known and made by him we have to know him; wherever his work touches us we have to look toward him because . . . he looks upon us."<sup>34</sup>

<sup>30</sup> von Lüpke speaks of a "logic of gift" in this context ("Gottes Gaben wahrnehmen," 289).

<sup>31</sup> \**Schöpfung und Erlösung*, 4.

<sup>32</sup> Walldorf, *Realistische Philosophie*, 253 n. 89; quoting \**Erkenntnislehre*, 47.

<sup>33</sup> *Ethik*, 259. Cf. above, p. 148 n. 235.

<sup>34</sup> *Dienst*, 61-62. A similar idea of *Nachdenken* can be found in Karl Barth (see A. Torrance, *Persons in Communion*, 74-5). A further investigation of these issues would have to examine Schlatter's notion of "sanctification of thinking through knowledge of the Bible" (*Dienst*, 60-67), his conviction that "[t]he love of God is the pure, imperishable root of theology on all its levels" (*Dogma*, 510) and the role of prayer in Schlatter's theology (see Neuer, "Introduction *Gründe*," 9-10 who also hints at the parallels between Schlatter and Karl Barth in this context). The result of such a study would be that, according to Schlatter, the *a posteriori* nature of theology and its being bound to its subject-matter is the ground of its unique objectivity and scientific character (see especially Schlatter's *Briefe*, 22-23 and his critical engagement with Paul Jäger in "Atheistic Methods").

## ii. Schlatter's thinking in polarities

Bockmühl aptly summarises the nature of Schlatter's thinking when he states:

The method of thinking by which Schlatter abides . . . is a method of circumspect *differentiation and synopsis* or synthesis, a form of complementary depiction as the only way in which justice is done to the manifoldness of the observed aspects. In our paper we were again and again urged to use expressions such as 'as well . . . as' and 'not only . . . but also.' Schlatter teaches that reality cannot be interpreted by a single, one-sided sentence."<sup>35</sup>

Indeed, our study has brought to light the synthetic power of Schlatter's dogmatic thinking.<sup>36</sup> Yet, the unity of his thought has diversity as its precondition and result. Härle – in his foreword to Walldorf's *Realistische Philosophie* – refers to Schlatter's "thinking in polarities" as "stimulating and trend-setting." We may speak of an integrative-polar character of Schlatter's theological thinking in which a) the unity of the theological material does not reduce its diversity and particularity to a uniformity, and b) the plurality and distinctness of the theological material does not allow its unity to collapse into irreconcilable dualisms.

The material waiting for our work is an uncountable diversity, an inexhaustible plurality; and this diversity shouts at us: unite me; I am the work of the One; you have known me if I have become a whole. . . . Because the uncountable and the inexhaustible shows itself to us in order that we recognise the unity and wholeness in it, the failure [of theological work] comes close to us in a double shape. If we lose unity, then a splintered expanse of ruins evolves, a heap of notes. If we lose plurality, then the hollow abstraction evolves, the rattling formula, the meaningless idea.<sup>37</sup>

According to Schlatter, "[i]t is in the ability to see the particular and, at the same time, the whole that the systematic power of our thinking consists. A system is a totality in which the fullness of what is perceived is pervaded with – and formed by – a unity."<sup>38</sup>

The results of our study urge us to conceive of the integrative-polar character of Schlatter's thinking as being grounded in his understanding of God's triune love which – *ad*

<sup>35</sup> Bockmühl, "Wahrnehmung," 106.

<sup>36</sup> See e.g. Rückblick, 235-36; Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter: ein Leben*, 493; Bailer, *Prinzip*, 46-47, 59-61, 74 n. 50, 192-94.

<sup>37</sup> "Erfolg und Mißerfolg," 260. See also "Significance of Method," 66.

<sup>38</sup> *Dogma*, 19.

*intra* as well as *ad extra* – works both unity and diversity.<sup>39</sup> The fact that Schlatter explicitly refers to God as the conceptual basis for the unity as well as the polarity of his thinking is only explicable against the background of his doctrine of God's triune being and action.<sup>40</sup> Along these lines Schlatter marks the *a posteriori* nature of his method stating "that the systematics of knowing is grounded and actual in its object and that it becomes distorted only if we allow ourselves artificiality and succumb to the fantastic arrogance that the ideas arbitrarily made up by ourselves are wiser than reality."<sup>41</sup>

On account of these conclusions, our suggestion is that any discussion of Schlatter's structuring of the dogmatic loci in his *Dogma* cannot get around the fact that he proceeds according to the trinitarian structure of the divine actions and works in this world, a structure consisting of continuity in discontinuity.<sup>42</sup>

### iii. Schlatter's concept of *analogia entis*

Schlatter holds that theological statements about God's being on the basis of God's works must be analogical predications. As such, they are neither entirely equivocal nor wholly univocal statements. The theological thought, as Schlatter phrases it, "employs the category of similarity at its highest level by the mightiest distinction that separates Creator from creature; God from the world, and by the most glorious likeness which makes that

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<sup>39</sup> See especially above, Chapter IV. 2. A. iii.

<sup>40</sup> See *Ethik*, 252, 258-61; *Briefe*, 22-23; *Sprechstunde*, 32. When Schlatter speaks of God as his "*a priori*" in this context, this "*a priori*" is of a radical *a posteriori* character. For, as Walldorf elaborates, the "fundamental difference between Kant and Schlatter" lies in the fact that "for the former, the categories of knowing (and the forms of intuition) constitute 'reality,' [whereas] for the latter, reality constitutes and/or sets the categories of knowing" (*Realistische Philosophie*, 101).

<sup>41</sup> *Dogma*, 19; similarly in "Theology of the New Testament and Dogmatics," 172-73.

<sup>42</sup> Rieger – albeit without reference to the trinitarian hermeneutic of Schlatter's concept – has done this in an exemplary way in *Rechtfertigungslehre*, 241-49. The author takes all the relevant secondary sources into account and indicates how the issues at stake are connected with the question about natural theology.

which has been generated by God into his image."<sup>43</sup> Schlatter works implicitly with an *analogia entis* which God institutes between himself and his creatures.<sup>44</sup> This *analogia entis* assumes, as we have seen, the form of an analogy of operation and relation, whereby the close connection with Schlatter's statements on the *imago Dei* of man is obvious. However, these observations must not be interpreted as indicating a rejection of an ontological understanding of *analogia entis*. In this case, Schlatter would contradict himself because his is a dynamic understanding of being as being in action and relation, for which reason an analogy of proper proportionality could – in the same way as an *analogia entis* – lead to a problematic subsumption of God and world under the same category of being.<sup>45</sup> Schlatter obviates such a subsumption in different ways. First, in correlation to his trinitarian concept of divine action, Schlatter gives primacy to God: that which is analogically predicated is a) predicated primarily of God and b) ascribed to the creature in dependence upon, and derivation from, God.<sup>46</sup> Second, the doctrine of the immanent Trinity provides Schlatter with the conceptual equipment to maintain an absolute ontological distinction between God's being and the being of the creature. *Ens* can be predicated of God because – as the triune one – he has being eternally and perfectly in himself. The creature has *ens* not in itself but only in dependence upon, and as gift from, God. Given the fact that Schlatter, as we have remarked earlier, hesitates to penetrate the mystery of God's inner being, the evidence we have gathered is strong enough to argue that Schlatter has an analogical rather

<sup>43</sup> *Metaphysik*, 46.

<sup>44</sup> See Walldorf, *Realistische Philosophie*, 167–68; Neuer, "Introduction *Metaphysik*," 10; idem, *Zusammenhang*, 62–64, 337–38; Kindt, *Gedanke der Einheit*, 129–30, 137–38.

<sup>45</sup> A. Torrance makes clear that replacing a "straightforward predication of a simple attribute" with a "predication of a similarity of relations" is merely transferring "the similarity from a) the quality to b) the subject's relation to the quality." "It is not clear why correspondence between relationships is relevantly different from correspondence between 'beings' or 'attributes' – especially if we are not to dichotomise between being and act or being and being-in-relation" (*Persons in Communion*, 140, 186).

<sup>46</sup> See e.g. *Dogma*, 29–30. Walldorf rightly points to the parallels between Schlatter and Thomas Aquinas (*Realistische Philosophie*, 167). For the latter's "analogy of one to another according to priority and posteriority" see A. Torrance, *Persons in Communion*, 136–39.

than a univocal concept of being. It is precisely in this that the idea of *analogia entis* unfolds its full meaning and inner truth.<sup>47</sup>

iv. A critical engagement with Kindt's interpretation of Schlatter's dogmatics

The results of this dissertation require a brief critical dialogue with Kindt's study in which she argues for the concept of unity as the central motive and proper theme of Schlatter's theology.<sup>48</sup> The merit of her study is to have outlined the synthetic force of Schlatter's theology and the connecting lines between Schlatter and Baader. However, in the decisive points of her interpretation of Schlatter's approach, we cannot follow her. According to Kindt, Schlatter has a theonomous or theistic concept of creaturely being and actuality (138, 142). Schlatter, so Kindt, grounds the relation between God and the world in a "*Grundgesetz der Einheit*" which corresponds to God's own being (150). It is according to this "*Grundgesetz der Einheit*" that Schlatter develops his understanding of all theological and anthropological data: "*Und über dies alles hinaus wird mit dem Begriff 'Einheit' das innerste Geheimnis der Theologie angesprochen, nämlich die Verbindung, die der allmächtige und verborgene Gott zu dem sündigen Geschöpf stiftet. Von dieser Zentralbedeutung aus soll sich der Begriff bis in die entferntesten Erscheinungen von 'Einheit' hinein erstrecken*" (148).

Kindt is aware that Schlatter demarcates his concept of unity from such ideas as "*Ein-erleiheit*," "*leere Eins*," "*Vereinerleiung*," "*Einseitigkeit*," "*Dualismus*" and "*Monismus*" (12, 26-27, 147) and that the "*Urbild*" of unity – God's unity – can take manifoldness into

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<sup>47</sup> On account of this, Walldorf's interpretation that Schlatter does not have an ontological understanding of *analogia entis* is not only questionable but also superfluous (see also Neuer's critique in "Review of *Realistische Philosophie*," 933). Along the above lines it is indeed appropriate to translate the term *analogia entis* as "*Analogie des Seienden*" rather than "*Analogie des Seins*" (see Neuer, *Zusammenhang*, 338). For the univocal concept of being in John Duns Scotus and Thomas Aquinas' analogical concept of being, see Drumm, *Doxologie und Dogma*, 299-323; Schulz, *Sein und Trinität*, 77-81.

<sup>48</sup> Kindt, *Gedanke der Einheit*, 11-12. Further references appear in the main text in brackets.

itself (68, 86). Nevertheless, she critiques that Schlatter's theology unfolds a "*Seinsbegriff*. . . *der auf Analogie, ja auf Identität hin angelegt ist*" (134). This *analogia entis* is the basis on which Schlatter a) levels out the ontological distinction between God and creature (137, 150) and b) excludes *a priori* any antithetical aspects from the actuality of man and world as the work of the one God (54, 134, 138).

Even a benevolent critique of this interpretation cannot get around the fact that Kindt, first of all, fails to see the *a posteriori* character of Schlatter's theology. Schlatter's understanding of the unity of God's works is not the result of imposing an *a priori* principle of knowing upon the perceived object but is ontologically grounded in the same.<sup>49</sup> Further, and this is the central point to be critiqued, Kindt does not explore what could be called the trinitarian foundation of Schlatter's concept of unity. For this reason, she misses the whole emphasis which Schlatter puts on the notion of otherness and particularity as the precondition and the result of unity. It is this interrelation of unity and distinctness on the basis of which Schlatter – on explicitly christological grounds – a) relates God and world; God's actions and works and b) is able to outline unity and plurality as ontological constituents of creaturely being. In doing so, as we have worked out, Schlatter is very keen to create that conceptual space between the different relata which is necessary to give due weight to their respective authenticity and *Selbständigkeit*. Kindt's interpretation fails to capture this side of Schlatter's thinking – for which reason some of her conclusions need to be revised. To give an example, Schlatter's theology of nature is not merely grounded upon the notion that nature – as God's work – is one with God (see 29-31). Rather, precisely because nature is distinct from God and – in its *Selbständigkeit* – characterised by its own intrinsic rational-

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<sup>49</sup> See e.g. *Rückblick*, 110-11, 235-36 and Walldorf, *Realistische Philosophie*, 108-12. In this sense it is, indeed, appropriate to speak of Schlatter's "*Theologie der Einheit*" (Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter: ein Leben*, 493).

ity and intelligibility, it reveals its Creator. "However, not that which nature is lacking makes it a revelation of God, but that which it is and has."<sup>50</sup>

In sum, one suspects that Kindt's own premise – an axiomatically presupposed antithesis between God and man – made her overlook that Schlatter, by means of his trinitarian understanding of God and his agency, has departed from that frame of reference in which God's transcendence and otherness are contrasted with his relation to, and interaction with, the world.<sup>51</sup>

#### v. Schlatter's contribution – concluding observations

The twofold movement of thought by which Schlatter relates knowledge of God's triune being with knowledge of God's triune economy can also be articulated as follows: Schlatter's doctrine of the Trinity entails elements of a phenomenology of love,<sup>52</sup> and his anthropology – which constitutes an ontology of creation and man – entails elements of a trinitarian ontology. The christocentric way in which Schlatter executes both movements gives his thinking a biblical form. It is in this context that we locate the primary significance of Schlatter's conception for trinitarian theology today. His contribution does not lie in his offering an extensive and explicit exposition of a doctrine of the Trinity. Rather, it lies in his modelling a theology which operates in a manner appropriate to its object. Schlatter offers a theology that speaks trinitarianly about God – an *applied trinitarian theology*, as we may call it.

The trinitarian name of God gives us the final glance into what God is. However, it has truth and power only then, when it does not lose its connection to the act of God out of which it arises. The theological tradition has not always emphasised this connection clearly. Rather, the inclination has been to turn the dogma of the Trinity into a description of God that stands for itself, not telling us any-

<sup>50</sup> *Dogma*, 52. Cf. Gunton, *A Brief Theology of Revelation*, 61.

<sup>51</sup> For a similar critique of Kindt's interpretation see Walldorf, *Realistische Philosophie*, 20.

<sup>52</sup> See Walldorf, *Realistische Philosophie*, 212.

thing about his relationship to us. Under these conditions, it [the doctrine of the Trinity] not only remains worthless but easily becomes damaging. That is, it generates an appearance of knowledge of God which consists merely in words. The New Testament does not participate in this employment of the doctrine of the Trinity because it grounds all its statements about God in the divine action that seizes us.<sup>53</sup>

We are well-advised to listen to these words afresh since trinitarian theology today is still uneasy with respect to that which we see integrated in Schlatter's approach. Contemporary theology seems to oscillate between treating the ontological Trinity as an ideal for constructing a view of this world as God's creation and surrendering the ontological Trinity for the sake of God's action and work *pro nobis*. As Gunton phrases it, "limiting expression to the economic Trinity" or "using an ontological trinitarianism as an immanent principle of reality" are the two dangerous tendencies in trinitarian theology today.<sup>54</sup> Schlatter helps us to see that the interrelation between God's triune being *ad intra* and his trinitarian action *pro nobis* is vital for theology. Without the mutual reference from one to the other, theology is divested of its conceptual means to establish true knowledge of either. That such a theology requires a fuller and more elaborate doctrine of the immanent Trinity than Schlatter is able to provide, should have become clear during the course of this study. However, it is difficult to exaggerate the significance of his theology for the task of systematic theology. Four elements in his approach warrant specific mention in this respect, namely, the success with which he seeks

- a) to develop a concept of divine agency in which God's involvement with the world is not played out against his transcendence and vice versa
- b) to outline a structural theory of God's actions and works which is firmly grounded on the principle of *opera trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa* without denying that the redemption and completion of a fallen creation requires creative divine actions and works

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<sup>53</sup> *Dogma*, 356.

<sup>54</sup> Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, XVII-XXI. Roth's critique of different trinitarian theologies – whether it is justified or not – is a further illustration of this uneasiness (see his essay "Trinitätslehre als Rahmentheorie?").



- c) to construe a model of the relation between God's being and action and human being and action in which due space is given to the distinctness of both
- d) to operate in propriety to the object of theology, that is, the God of Scripture who – in the person and work of Jesus Christ – has made himself known as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The fact that these contributions come from a theologian whose work dates back to the end of the 19th century, makes it fully appropriate to speak of Schlatter as a true "teacher of the church."<sup>55</sup> We now hope that our reconstruction and analysis of the trinitarian grammar of Schlatter's theology provides the basis for the next task, namely, to engage in a conversation between Schlatter's conception and contemporary systematic theology. In light of this thesis, it is not inconceivable, indeed, that the renaissance of trinitarian thinking today may lead, in the same way as in the ecumenical debate<sup>56</sup>, to a serious and critical reassessment of Schlatter's dogmatics within academic theology.

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<sup>55</sup> See Mußner, "Introduction *Jakobus*," VI.

<sup>56</sup> See the final chapter in Rieger, *Rechtfertigungslehre*, 398-436.

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